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William Hazlitt and the Poles of Romantic Perception

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WILLIAM HAZLITT
AND
THE POLES OF ROMANTIC PERCEPTION

by
Thomas J. Mann

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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for my parents

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I am indebted also to the many scholars whose work has preceded mine, especially to those who have collected Hazlitt's Works into a manageable form. One fact brought home to me very strongly in the past two years is the truism that a good structure must rest upon a firm foundation. Without the editorial accomplishments of Messrs. Howe, Waller, and Glover to build upon, the present study simply could not have been done.

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VITA

The author, Thomas Joseph Mann, is the son of Charles H. Mann and Margaret (Hayden) Mann. He was born February 21, 1948.

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"Everything has its turn in this chequered scene of things, unless we prevent it from taking its turn by over-rigid conditions, or drive men to despair or the most callous effrontery, by erecting a standard of perfection, to which no one can conform in reality!"

--William Hazlitt
"On Cant and Hypocrisy"
(1828)

CHAPTER I

FOUNDATIONS: THE ESSAY AND IMAGINATION

"Till I began to paint, or till I became acquainted with the author of The Ancient Mariner, I could neither write nor speak. He encouraged me to write a book, which I did to the original bent of my mind."
(1828: xvii, 312)¹

Hazlitt's An Essay on the Principles of Human Action, published anonymously in 1805, is important in that, first, it marks the beginning of the writing career of one of the greatest English essayists of the nineteenth century; and, second, it sheds revealing light upon the whole subsequent course and content of that career.

Although largely ignored by contemporaries,² the thoughts expressed in the Essay remained with Hazlitt for the rest of his life; he restated his same argument in published works in 1819 and again in 1828. And looking back

¹All references are to P.P. Howe's Centenary Edition of Hazlitt's Complete Works (21 vols.; London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1930-1934).

²Keats was an exception--he owned a copy of the Essay (cf. The Keats Circle, ed. by H.E. Rollins [2nd edn., 2 vols.;

at his first book from a vantage point of twenty-three years later, he could still write of it with pride: "Yet, let me say that that work contains an important metaphysical discovery, supported by a continuous and severe train of reasoning, nearly as subtle and original as anything in Hume or Berkeley" (xvii, 312).

The purpose of the Essay is indicated by its subheading, "Being an Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind." It was conceived as a philosophical refutation of key doctrines of what Hazlitt later called "the modern school of philosophy." Among the sins of this

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965], I, 254), and his reading of it firmly impressed upon him Hazlitt's ideas of "disinterestedness" (cf. W.J. Bate's John Keats [Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963], 202, 216, 240, 254-259, 586).

Coleridge had various connections with the book. After initially encouraging the young Hazlitt to write it (xi, 4; xvii, 312) he remained silent when a copy was sent to him at the Lakes (Lamb records the delivery; cf. Lucas's edition of his Letters [3 vols.; London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. & Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1935], I, 420). Only years later did he acknowledge that it demonstrated "great ability and originality" (cf. On the Constitution of Church and State. . . Lay Sermons. . . [Henry Nelson Coleridge, ed.; London: William Pickering, 1839], 380n; see also xi, 3, in Hazlitt's Works: "Even Mr. Coleridge held his piece for twelve years, and then put it into a note to his Second Lay-Sermon, that this was a work of great acuteness and originality"). Note, though, that Hazlitt received this belated praise very bitterly (xi, 4).

Herschel Baker, in William Hazlitt (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), asserts that, according to DeQuincey, Coleridge claimed to

school of thought, based largely on Hobbes,³ were its assertions that "all our ideas are derived from external objects by means of sense alone"; that "the sense of pleasure and pain is the sole spring of action, and self-interest the source of all our affections"; and that "the mind acts from a mechanical or physical necessity, over which it has no controul, and consequently is not a moral or accountable agent" (ii, 144-145). Such assertions eroded the philosophical base

have suggested everything "important" in the book (p. 141). I think that this should be clarified, especially in regard to the first reference that Baker offers in his footnote. DeQuincey wrote:

"Amongst the philosophical works of Hazlitt, I do not observe that Mr. Gilfillan is aware of two that are likely to be specially interesting. One is an examination of David Hartley, at least as to his law of association. Thirty years ago, I looked into it slightly; but my reverence for Hartley offended me with its tone; and afterwards, hearing that Coleridge challenged for his own most of what was important in the thoughts, I lost all interest in the essay. . . . It forms part of the volume which contains the Essay on Human Action."

(Cf. DeQuincey's Collected Writings [14 vols.; Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1889-1890], XI, 351f.) Coleridge was obviously referring, here, to Some Remarks on the Systems of Hartley and Helvetius, which was appended to the Essay in the 1805 volume, and not to the Essay itself. DeQuincey does say elsewhere, however, that Coleridge "used to assert" that the Essay itself was "derived entirely" from him (III, 82). But here DeQuincey may be confusing the Essay with the appended Remarks, especially since Coleridge did indeed elsewhere refer to the Essay as a work of "originality."

³ See W.P. Albrecht's Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1965), 1-21, for a review of this tradition.

for the existence of moral action; it was to restore this base that Hazlitt derived his argument.

The key points of his reasoning are:

- 1) That the human mind is not motivated by present physical objects at all; rather, it is motivated only by ideas of future objects:

The objects in which the mind is interested may be either past or present, or future. These last alone can be the objects of rational or voluntary pursuit; for neither the past, nor the present can be altered for the better, or worse by any efforts of the will. It is only from the interest excited in him by future objects that man becomes a moral agent

(i, 1)

All voluntary action, that is all action proceeding from a will, or effort of the mind to produce a certain event must relate to the future, or to those things, the existence of which is problematical, [and] undetermined We are never interested in things themselves which are the real, ultimate, practical objects of volition: the feelings of desire, aversion, &c. connected with voluntary action are always excited by the ideas of those things before they exist.

(i, 8)

- 2) That the imagination is the means by which these future objects act upon the mind:

The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself . . .

(i, 1)

But that which is future, which does not yet exist can excite no interest in itself, nor act upon the mind in any way but by means of the imagination.

(i, 8)

- 3) That "self is a concept which can be thought of only in relation to one's past and present being, not to one's future being:

However nearly allied, however similar I may be to my future self, whatever other relation I may bear to that self, so long as there is not this intercommunity of thoughts and feelings, so long as there is an absolute separation, an insurmountable barrier fixed between the present, and the future, so that I neither am, nor can possibly be affected at present by what I am to feel hereafter, I am not to any moral or practical purpose the same being.

(i, 10-11)

I saw plainly that the consciousness of my own feelings which is made the foundation of my continued interest in them could not extend to what had never been, and might never be, that my identity with myself must be confined to the connection of my past and present being, . . .

(i, 47)

- 4) That future objects cannot mechanically interest one's present self:

The question is whether . . . [a child's] future impressions affect him as much and impel him to action with the same mechanical force as if they were actually present. This is so far from being true that his future impressions do not exert the smallest influence over his actions, they do not affect him mechanically in any degree.

(i, 30)

It is absurd to suppose that the feelings which I am to have hereafter should excite certain correspondent impressions, or presentiments of themselves before they exist, or act mechanically upon my mind by a secret sympathy.

(i, 39)

5) That, therefore, all contemplation of future objects is done selflessly; and that, since one is motivated only by contemplation of future objects, one is therefore motivated selflessly (i.e., without self-interest):

It is plain . . . that there is no communication between my future interests, and the motives by which my present conduct must be governed. . . . I cannot therefore have a principle of active self-interest arising out of the immediate connection between my present and future self, for no such connection exists, or is possible.

(i, 48)

With this argument Hazlitt believed that he had pulled down the key pillars of the Hobbesian school of ethics; he thought that, since he had proven the act of choice to be not necessarily selfish, the possibility of free moral decision was thus demonstrated to exist. In his words, "we are not obliged at last to establish generosity and virtue 'lean pensioners' on self-interest" (i, 17).

The keystone in the structure of his argument is his concept of the imagination. An appreciation of the role played by this faculty is essential not only to comprehend the complexities of the Essay itself, but also to grasp the essential elements of Hazlitt's thought through-

out his later writings. It is helpful, first, to see the imagination as contrasted to the understanding. Since the essayist used these terms throughout his career, and since we shall be concerned with that whole career, I believe that an examination of his usual distinction of these faculties will be useful.

The understanding is "a superintending faculty, which alone perceives the relations of things, and enables us to comprehend their connexions, forms, and masses" (ii, 151; xx, 25). It is the power of arranging and combining the data of sense-perception into unified ideas.⁴ In 1812 Hazlitt refers to the understanding as "the cementing power of the mind" (ii, 280). And in 1814 he cites for an example the process of forming an idea of a table, a chair, a blade of grass, or a grain of sand:

Every one of these includes a certain configuration, hardness, colour, size, &c., i.e., impressions of different things, received by different senses, which must be put together by the understanding before they can be referred to any particular object, or considered as one idea.

(xx, 25)

Earlier in this same work ("Madame de Staël's Account of German Philosophy") he says:

⁴Much like the familiar "complex ideas" of Locke. Cf. his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II, xii.

The only power of the sensitive faculty is to receive blind, unconscious, unconnected impressions; the only category of the understanding is to perceive the relations between these impressions, so as to connect them consciously together, or to form ideas.

(xx, 20n)

The mind is naturally constituted to automatically combine the data of the senses, to automatically mould it into wholes. Thus, in 1829, Hazlitt writes that "the mould in which truth must be cast . . . is born with us"; and that "Truth is, in a word, the shape which our ideas take in the moulds of the understanding; just as the potter's clay derives its figure (whether round or square) from the mould in which it is cast" (xx, 228).

Whereas the understanding arranges and combines physical impressions, the imagination, on a higher level, deals with moral values; the important difference is the ethical quality of imaginative ideas. "The direct primary motive, or impulse which determines the mind to the volition of any thing must therefore in all cases depend on the idea of that thing as conceived of by the imagination" (i, 8). It is through the imagination that the will is motivated--i.e., the will acts in accordance with the values presented to it by the imagination:

[My real interest] is fundamentally, and in it's origin and by it's very nature the creature of reflection, and

imagination, and whatever can be made the subject of these, whether relating to ourselves or others, may also be the object of an interest powerful enough to become the motive of volition and action.

(i, 11)

In 1819, in A Letter to William Gifford, Hazlitt states that

it is the same faculty [a reasoning imagination] that carries us out of ourselves as well as beyond the present moment, that pictures the thoughts, passions, and feelings of others to us, and interests us in them, that clothes the whole possible world with a borrowed reality, that breathes into all other forms the breath of life, and endows our sympathies with vital warmth, and diffuses the soul of morality through all the relations and sentiments of our social being.⁵

(ix, 58)

The distinctive moral aspect of imaginative perception is again stressed in 1825:

What the proportion between the good and evil will really be found in any of the supposed cases [e.g., wars, atrocities, fires, murders], may be a question to the understanding; but to the imagination and the heart, that is, to the natural feelings of mankind, it admits of none!

(xi, 11)

And the connection of imagination and morality is asserted again in 1827:

Indignation, contempt of the base and grovelling, makes the philosopher no less than the poet; and it is the power of looking beyond self [i.e., imagination] that enables each to inculcate moral truth and nobleness of sentiment, the one by general concepts, the other by individual example.

(xvii, 297)

⁵My italics, here as elsewhere throughout the dissertation.

This distinction between the imagination and the understanding is one that Hazlitt usually abides by. However, it must be pointed out that he is frequently inconsistent or imprecise in his use of these (and other) terms. For example, he may equate understanding with reason⁶ at one time (ii, 166), and with ideas at another (xx, 24), and with free will itself at still another (xx, 61). More important, he may occasionally confuse the understanding with the imagination, as he does at one point in "On Liberty and Necessity" in 1812: "The body is said to be free when it has the power to obey the direction of the will: so the will may be said to be free when it has the power to obey the dictates of the understanding [i.e., the imagination]" (ii, 255). The reality of this imprecision or carelessness cannot be ignored by Hazlitt scholars, nor has it been;⁷

⁶Reason, for Hazlitt, is a systematic analytical power. As he says in "On Locke's Essay":

"This property of the understanding, by which certain judgments naturally follow certain perceptions, and are followed by other judgments, is the faculty of reason, or order and proportion in the mind, and is indeed nothing but the understanding acting by rule or necessity."

(1812: ii, 166)

In the Essay on the Principles of Human Action itself he says that reason is "the faculty by which we reflect upon and compare our ideas" (i, 19n). See John Bullitt, "Hazlitt and the Romantic Conception of the Imagination," Philological Quarterly, XXIV (1945), p. 344.

⁷Elisabeth Schneider, for example, notes the matter

my own response to the problem is to take with a grain of salt any of Hazlitt's individual statements on topics which are of habitual interest to him, for any one statement can often be directly contradicted by another somewhere else in the voluminous writings. I think that it is safer to follow patterns of ideas--when a pattern of similar statements is found throughout the Hazlitt canon, one may feel justified in placing emphasis on an individual instance of it. If a statement is not verified by belonging to the context of a consistent pattern of like statements, one must feel less safe with it in dealing with this particular writer. I am therefore especially concerned myself with delineating the patterns of the essayist's thought, the repeated manifestations of similar ideas throughout his writings. Again, for example, I think that the present distinction between his ideas on the understanding and the imagination is generally valid--it is not without pitfalls and exceptions; but, on the whole, most of the revelant writings conform to this pattern.

of imprecise diction in her study The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), p. 99.

Once it is understood that moral values are connected with imagination in Hazlitt's philosophy, it must also be seen that Hazlitt's ideas on the precise nature of this connection fall into two additional and opposite patterns. Apparently he did not recognize (or, perhaps, wish to recognize) the inconsistency which exists in the Essay; what is important to realize, though, is that his later writings on the imagination, and therefore on values in human life in general, proceed in two opposite directions, each following closely one side of the inconsistency first noticeable in the Essay.

The last sentence of the Essay refers to "the imagination, which is naturally affected in a certain manner by the prospect of good or evil"; it is the "certain manner" in which imagination is linked with good or evil (i.e., moral values) which creates the problem of the argument. On the whole, Hazlitt wishes to prove that the imagination perceives good or evil in ideas of objects, and that the good or evil perceived is independent of the mind, and of self-interest. But he leaves a loophole open which allows for the possibility that the imagination can also create values in the ideas it forms; that values come not from mental objects seen by the imagination, but, on the contrary, come

from the mind of the individual himself and are invested in such objects rather than received from them.

A closer look at Hazlitt's argument is necessary here. The case that he wishes to prove is that the mind perceives good or evil which exists, he says, in ideas of objects, and which does not exist beforehand in the person who creates those ideas of objects. First of all, he has this to say about the value properties of objects themselves (rather than the value properties of ideas of those objects):

It is plain there must be something in the nature of objects themselves which of itself determines the mind to consider them as desirable or the contrary previously to any reference of them to ourselves. They are not converted into good or evil by being impressed on our minds, but they affect our minds in a certain manner because they are essentially good or evil.

(i, 18)

Feelings of pleasure or pain are entirely coordinate with the good or evil which exists in external objects; to speak of pleasure or pain is thus to refer to inherent properties of external objects, not to peculiar receptive properties of individual minds:

I think that . . . the idea of personal pleasure or pain can only affect the mind as a distinct idea of that which is in itself the object of desire, or aversion.

(i, 5)

The subtle transition that Hazlitt makes in his argument is that ideas of objects have exactly the same inherent properties that the objects themselves have; the same essential properties to create pleasure or pain reside in both objects themselves and in imaginative ideas of those objects. This is apparent in a reply the essayist makes to a possible objection:

This notion [to suppose that the imagination does not exert a direct influence over human action] could not have gained ground as an article of philosophical faith but from a perverse restriction of the use of the word idea to abstract ideas, or external forms, as if the essential quality in the feelings of pleasure, or pain, must entirely evaporate in passing through the imagination; and, again, from associating the work imagination with merely fictitious situations and events, that is, such as never will have a real existence, and as it is supposed never will, and which consequently do not admit of action.

(i, 23)

It is thus denied that the imagination represents only external forms of objects; Hazlitt's contention (here, at least) is that it also represents the essential properties of objects. Imaginative ideas, he continues, are not mere powerless fictions; they have all the motivating force of actual objects, the "essential quality" of which does not evaporate in passing through the imagination. This point is made again in "Some Remarks on the Systems of Hartley and Helvetius," which he published in the same volume with the Essay in 1805:

But it seems to me a much more rational way to suppose that [an] idea does not lose it's efficacy by being combined with different circumstances, that it retains the same general nature as the original impression, that it therefore gives a new and immediate impulse to the mind, and that it's tendency to produce action is not entirely owing to the association between the original impression, and a particular action, which it mechanically excites over again. First, because the connection between the impression and action was not accidental but necessary, and therefore the connection between the idea and action is not to be attributed to association, but to the general nature of the human mind by which similar effects follow from similar causes.

(i, 80)

The mind is thus affected by ideas just as it is affected by impressions of actual objects. And good and evil, pleasure and pain--in short, moral values, or those properties which motivate choice--reside inherently in objects (and in ideas of objects) and are perceived there by the mind. The self, in acts of moral choice, is thus affected by forces essentially not of its own creation, for the essences of ideas are derived from external objects and not from internal acts of imaginative creation. Value lies in objects themselves, and therefore the same value is automatically present in ideas of objects:

This implies that the object, in which I am supposed to be interested without being sensible of it, is in itself interesting to me, that it is an object in which I can and must necessarily be interested, the moment it is known to me: . . . To go farther than this, and say that the mind as the representative of truth is or ought to be interested in things as they are really and truly interesting in themselves, without any reference

to the manner in which they immediately affect the individual, is to destroy at once the foundation of every principle of selfishness,

(i, 31)

In short, the self perceives rather than creates value in its own ideas.

This is a difficult position to hold, and Hazlitt occasionally realizes it. For if motivating ideas of future objects are entirely divorced from present and past external objects (as he insists they are), then this implies either of two things: a) that future objects actually exist by themselves somewhere, in a kind of Platonic world of their own which is not dependent for its existence on creation by a human mind; and that imagination simply perceives these independently-existing objects in this external world; or, b) that future objects are in reality simply ideas which are entirely created by the mind.⁸ But if they are the latter, then everything about these ideas--including their properties of moral value--is created by the self of the individual.

⁸These ideas themselves, then, would exist in the present. This points up a weakness in Hazlitt's argument: since the mind is actually dealing with present phantoms of future objects, the self--which Hazlitt says does exist in the present, though not in the future--can indeed be connected with these present ideas, and so modify them with self-interest. Hazlitt does not seem to be aware of this loophole; however, he is aware of another (as I will point out in the ensuing discussion), that ideas of future objects are created rather than perceived.

Nowhere does Hazlitt prove, or attempt to prove, that future objects exist by themselves, independently of the mind. To the contrary, his argument develops along the line that imagination creates ideas of future objects. In so arguing, however, he realizes that imagination is not necessarily bound to accord with the reality of the external world:

It is the very nature of the imagination to change the order in which things have been impressed on the senses, and to connect the same properties with different objects, and different properties with the same objects; to combine our original impressions in all possible forms, and to modify those impressions themselves to a very great degree.

(i, 26)

But if it is asserted that the imagination can indeed modify impressions, then the loophole is left open that such a modifying imagination can, in particular, change the value properties of objects. And Hazlitt tacitly recognizes this possibility even as he tries to assert the contrary. For example, he denies that the "essential quality" of objects "must entirely evaporate in passing through the imagination." In denying only the most extreme case (that such properties must entirely evaporate) he implies that at times the essential (moral) quality can entirely evaporate. All he is asserting in effect, is that an object's inherent properties of value do not necessarily vanish in an imaginative representation of

the object; by implication, though, it is therefore possible that they can be lost. Again, he objects to those who exclusively limit the word "imagination" to an association with "merely fictitious" objects (i.e., those with no essential tie to external reality); he does not deny that imagination can deal with such "untied" objects--he simply argues that it does not always do so.

Similarly, he says that "the mind as the representative of truth is or ought to be interested in things as they are really and truly interesting in themselves." The words "or ought to be" are a characteristic weakening of the argument; they allow for the possibility that the mind need not be interested in things "in themselves" without reference to self-interest.

Hazlitt deals directly with the problem of imaginative objects untied to essential realities in another passage:

It does not surely by any means follow because the reality of future objects can only be judged of by the mind, that therefore it has no power of distinguishing between the probable consequences of things, and what can never happen; that it is to take every impulse of will or fancy for truth; or because future objects cannot act upon the mind from without, that therefore our ideas cannot have any reference to, or properly represent those objects, or anything external to the mind, but must consist entirely in the conscious contemplation of themselves.

I have italicized the words which indicate the extremity of the case Hazlitt argues for--he does not deny that the imagination can create objects free from external referents. Indeed, in this passage he assumes that it in fact does just this; his assertion here is simply that it does not always have to. Also, the fact that the statement begins with the emotionally argumentative word "surely" indicates again that Hazlitt cannot logically close the loophole that imagination can indeed create objects whose essential value property is dependent solely on the self and not on external reality.⁹

He is thus occasionally conscious that the mind can create values as well as perceive them. And though at times he simply admits or assumes this, at other times he presents a different, "compromise" solution to the dilemma. For example, in considering a starving man's action to obtain food, he admits that apparently the man is motivated solely by selfish interest. But he explains the situation like this:

⁹Roy Cain, in "David Hume and Adam Smith as Sources of the Concept of Sympathy in Hazlitt," Papers on English Language and Literature, I, 2 (Spring, 1965), 133-140, argues that Hazlitt derives his argument almost entirely from Hume and Smith, and that, therefore, "little claim can be made for originality in ethics, metaphysics, or psychology in the Essay" (p. 140). However, in leaving open the loophole which allows for a dual function of the imagination, and especially in fully expanding this loophole in his later writings, Hazlitt's work shows a corresponding dual emphasis different from the single focus on "sympathy" which so greatly concerned his predecessors.

the influence of appetite over our volitions may be accounted for consistently enough with the foregoing hypothesis from the natural effects of a particularly irritable state of bodily feeling, rendering the idea of that which will heighten and gratify it's susceptibility of pleasurable feeling, or remove some painful feeling proportionably vivid, and the object of a more vehement desire than can be excited by the same idea, when the body is supposed to be in a state of indifference, or only ordinary susceptibility to that particular kind of gratification. Thus the imaginary desire is sharpened by constantly receiving fresh supplies of pungency from the irritation of bodily feeling.

(i, 44)

Thus the desirability of, say, food is still an inherent property of food itself; a starving man's mind does not create value in it. Rather (according to this passage) his imagination simply perceives its essential value more vividly.

Seemingly, then, the imagination still functions in an essentially selfless manner in some instances when it apparently functions selfishly. But two points must be noted:

1) since Hazlitt elsewhere admits that the imagination can function selfishly¹⁰ (i.e., without essential ties to external reality), this argument explains away only some in-

¹⁰I use the word "selfishly" in a particular sense, merely as the opposite of "selflessly." I do not mean to imply undesirable moral characteristics when I use the term; I simply wish to indicate the operation of one of the two types of imagination found in Hazlitt's writings, i.e., that which imposes the filter of self in the process of perception ("selfish" imagination) as opposed to that which removes it ("selfless" imagination). Perhaps the words "individual" or "personal" would be synonymous with this restricted use of "selfish"; however, since the latter term most readily underscores the contrast I wish to make use of, I hope the reader

stances of selfish action; 2) since even in this instance the self of the starving man determines the relative proportion of values perceived in external objects (e.g., he may perceive more value in obtaining food and less value in the act of stealing it from another man, when in other circumstances he would do the reverse) his action is still ultimately motivated by selfishness--that is, the relative weight of perceived external values is determined according to personal standards not dependent on external objects. Thus, try as he might, Hazlitt cannot and does not ultimately close the loophole.

In the final analysis, then, the Essay on the Principles of Human Action allows that imagination can work in two essentially different ways. On the one hand, it may function impersonally by perceiving values inherently in ideas of external objects. On the other hand, it may function selfishly, in either of two ways: it may create values entirely from internal resources of the mind and invest them in objects and ideas, thereby "coloring" the objects of perception with personal values untied to external realities; or it may simply order or shape perceived values in personally deter-

will accept my continued use of the term in this special sense. I will therefore refrain from placing the word (or its derivatives, e.g., "selfishness") in quotation marks.

mined hierarchies, structuring perception according to forms which are independent of external checks.¹¹

¹¹Passion is an element sometimes distinguished from imagination in the process of determining moral truth. Whether the imagination perceives values or creates them, morality does not come "home" to an individual, Hazlitt believed, until such values are vitalized by human feelings. See, for example, "On Reason and Imagination":

"So with respect to moral truth (as distinct from mathematical), whether a thing is good or evil, depends on the quantity of passion, of feeling, of pleasure and pain connected with it, and with which we must be made acquainted in order to come to a sound conclusion, and not in the inquiry, whether it is round or square. Passion, in short, is the essence, the chief ingredient in moral truth; and the warmth of passion is sure to kindle the light of imagination on the objects around it."

(1826: xii, 46)

Note, though, that it is just the manner in which passion, or the feelings of pleasure and pain, is "connected" with moral truth that is left ambiguous. Is the "warmth of passion" an affective property of objects themselves (cf. pp. 13-16 above)? or is it a personal creation (cf. pp. 16-19)?

CHAPTER II

THE GENERIC TYPES OF PERCEPTION

"I hardly ever set about a paragraph or a criticism, but there was an undercurrent of thought, or some generic distinction on which the whole turned. Having got my clue, I had no difficulty in stringing pearls upon it."
(1828: xvii, 312)

Throughout his critical practice Hazlitt was more concerned with how men perceived their world than with what they saw; he considered the object or content of a man's perception to be of secondary value to his method of perception itself. This attention to the way men see probably developed from Hazlitt's own early training as a painter; and his later writings on art reflect this training. For example, in the essay "On Criticism" from 1822 he writes: "But the power of execution [in an art work], the manner of seeing nature is one thing, and may be so superlative (if you are only able to judge of it) as to countervail every disadvantage of subject" (viii, 219-220).¹ Similarly, he writes in 1824 that "If a

¹Note, too, Hazlitt's sharp distinction between an object (St. James's Palace) and our perception of that object

picture is admirable in its kind, we do not give ourselves much trouble about the subject" (x, 22). Hazlitt saw paintings as embodiments of "kinds" of perception; the way the artist approached the subject produced the interest of the work. So it was, too, with literary art works; for example, the essayist speaks thus of Walton's The Compleat Angler in 1823:

Some books have a personal character. We are attached to the work for the sake of the author. Thus we read Walton's Angler as we should converse with an agreeable old man, not for what he says, so much as for his manner of saying it, and the pleasure he takes in his subject.

(ix, 182)

He had something similar in mind in 1830 when he published his own conversations with that other interesting--though perhaps less agreeable--old man, James Northcote. In his original introductory note to the Conversations, he says that in trying to reconstruct Northcote's words, "My object was to catch the tone and manner, rather than to repeat the exact impressions, or even opinions" (xi, 350n). What fascinated Hazlitt was how the old painter saw and organized his world, as revealed in his manner of speaking and painting; Hazlitt himself admits that "I have forgotten, mistaken, mis-stated,

in "Madame de Staël's Account of German Philosophy" (1814: xx, 33).

altered, [or] transposed a number of things," so obviously the content of the conversations is of less importance than their revelation of Northcote's "manner."

Again in 1830, at the end of his life, Hazlitt offers an extended meditation on the value of the means by which men seek truth:

The pleasure of the chase, or the benefit derived from it, is not to be estimated by the value of the same after it is caught, so much as by the difficulty of starting it and the exercise afforded to the body and the excitement of the animal spirits in hunting it down: and so it is in the exercises of the mind and the pursuit of truth, which are chiefly valuable (perhaps) less for their results when discovered, than for their affording continual scope and employment to the mind in its endeavors to reach the fancied goal, without its being ever (or but seldom) able to attain it.² Regard the end, is an ancient saying, and a good one, if it does not mean that we are to forget the beginning and the middle. By insisting on the ultimate value of things when all is over, we may acquire the character of grave men, but not of wise ones. Passe pour cela. If we would set up such a sort of fixed and final standard of moral truth and worth, we had better try to construct life over again, so as to make it a punctum stans, and not a thing in progress; for as it is, every end, before it can be realized, implies a previous imagination, a warm interest in, and an active pursuit of, itself, all which are integral and vital parts of human existence, and it is a begging of the question to say that an end is only of value in itself, and not as it draws out the living resources,

²See viii, 234 (1822): "It is not then the value of the object, but the time and pains bestowed upon it that determines the sense and degree of our loss"; and xi, 277 (1829): "We set a value on things as they have cost us dear." Cf., too, "On the Love of Life" (1817: iv, 1-4).

and satisfies the original capacities of human nature.
(xx, 307)³

Insofar as any end draws out "the original capacities of human nature"--one major capacity being "a previous imagination"--it is valuable. The use of imagination is thus asserted to be an important thing in itself; for the objects which draw out imagination are said to be, in a sense, only means used to produce a possibly greater end, which is imaginative perception itself.

Hazlitt usually distinguishes two opposite "manners" of such imaginative perception, and these are in line with the bifurcation noticeable in the Essay on the Principles of Human Action, that imagination may be either selfless or

³Hazlitt's concern for the operation of the mind more than for the objects of perception is also evident in the Preface to his obscure English Grammar of 1809:

"It is common to suppose that the parts of speech, of different sorts of words, relate to different sorts of things or ideas; and that it was to express this difference in the subject-matter of discourse, that one class of words was appropriated to one class of things, and another to another. We have endeavored to show on the contrary, that the grammatical distinctions of words do not relate to the nature of the things or ideas spoken of, but to our manner of speaking of them, i.e., to the particular point of view in which we have occasion to consider them, or combine them with others in the same discourse."

(ii, 6-7)

Note also his definition of a substantive, two paragraphs later: "It is not the name of a thing really subsisting by itself (according to the old definition), but of a thing considered as subsisting by itself."

selfish: it may entirely abstract self from the process of perception of the world, or it may impose self as a medium through which reality is filtered. Obviously, then, how men see--which is what interests Hazlitt--is a function of imagination.

The essayist uses both sides of his theory of imagination throughout his career. When, in the Lectures on English Philosophy from 1812, he refers to his power to "go out of myself entirely" (ii, 239) he is utilizing his idea of the selfless imagination. In 1816 he makes further use of it in picturing the minds of children, who are "perpetually going out of themselves" (xvi, 67). In the following year he states that "Art shows us nature, divested of the medium of our prejudices" (iv, 74), i.e., that art embodies selfless perception. In 1823 he criticizes women for lacking the ability to see the world selflessly: "Women have as little imagination as they have reason. They are pure egotists. They cannot go out of themselves" (ix, 213). Three years later he analyzes the process of reading according to his accustomed theory:

in reading we always take the right side, and make the case properly our own. Our imaginations are sufficiently excited, we have nothing to do with the matter but as a pure creation of the mind, and we therefore yield to the natural, unwarped impressions of good and evil. Our own passions, interests, and prejudices are

out of the question, or in an abstracted point of view, we judge fairly and conscientiously, for conscience is nothing but the abstract idea of right and wrong.

(xii, 136n-137n)

"Abstract," of course, here means "separated from concrete existence"--specifically, separated from one's self. In 1828, again, the essayist refers to "Imagination, which owes no allegiance to self-interest" (xx, 168). Clearly, the concept of the selfless imagination remained with Hazlitt throughout his life.⁴

But so did his concept of the selfish imagination. In 1812 he writes of poets: "They feign the beautiful and grand out of their own minds, and imagine all things to be, not what they are, but what they ought to be" (iv, 152). This type of imagination can create objects--and values⁵--untied to external realities; it can also modify, mold, and arrange external objects by investments of personal energies. Thus, in 1816, he writes: "For the imagination is that power which represents objects, not as they are, but as they

⁴See also xviii, 122 (1817); here, objects in Vandyke's paintings are said to be presented to the eye without passing through any "medium." Similar statements about perception free from filters are found at iv, 74 (1817) and xii, 245 (1826).

⁵Hazlitt believed that the mind can perceive or create aesthetic values just as it does ethical values.

are moulded according to our fancies and feelings" (xvi, 63) --i.e., imagination (here) does not "repose entirely on nature" (cf. iv. 162); rather, it reposes on the particular ways in which the individual modifies nature. The same point is made again in "On Poetry in General" in 1818: "the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power" (v, 4). The "shapes" and "combinations" referred to are entirely creations of the poet himself; such personal modifications prevent external objects from being perceived "as they are in themselves." Hazlitt again utilizes this theory of imagination in The Spirit of the Age (1825), in which he writes: "We are not, then, so much to inquire what certain things are abstractedly or in themselves, as how they affect the mind, and to approve or condemn them accordingly" (xi, 9). To insist that the way in which the mind perceives objects is a vital part of moral determinations is to allow for variations among different individual minds. If morality hinges not on "objects themselves" but on the perception of such objects by individual minds, then, in saying this, Hazlitt is asserting that the self of the perceiver is indeed a vital part of the process of reckoning values. He emphasizes just this point a few

sentences later: ". . . so moral truth must present itself under a certain aspect and from a certain point of view, in order to produce its full and proper effect upon the mind." When he insists that "point of view" is essential in determining moral truth, he thereby calls for the presence of an individual personality in the process. And three years later, in 1828, he makes a similar point:

. . . the understanding takes a tincture from outward impulses and circumstances, and is led [by imagination, probably] to dwell on those suggestions which favour, and to blind itself to the objections which impugn, the side to which it previously and morally inclines.

(xvii, 310)

Morality is thus determined "previously" to the reception of "outward impulses and circumstances"; the mind funnels data from the external world into previously determined molds of value. And if such molds exist before the reception of external data, then obviously the self alone must have created them.⁶

⁶It is also possible, of course, that the self may simply be accepting the ready-made molds of value provided by social conventions. In this case, the process is similar--the mind still funnels external data into molds of value which are previously determined.

On the matter of filters being present in perception, see xi, 198 (1826): "I mentioned that I thought Sir Joshua more like Rembrandt than either Titian or Vandyke: he enveloped objects in the same brilliant haze of a previous mental conception." Note also the essayist's descriptions of Wordsworth and Rembrandt, particularly his interest in the "mediums" they create through which they view nature, e.g., xix, 19 (1814); iv, 121 (1817), viii, 43-44, 224 (1821).

Hazlitt thus held his dual theory of imagination throughout his life--and he held both sides of it simultaneously. In 1822, for example, he praised the "manners" of Vandyke and Leigh Hunt for exactly opposite reasons:

[Vandyke] was purely natural, and neither selected from nor added any thing from his own mind.

(viii, 318)

I prefer H---'s conversation almost to any other person's, because, with a familiar range of subjects, he colours with a totally new and sparkling light, reflected from his own character.

(viii, 202)

This discrepancy in critical standards, based on his differing conceptions of imagination, did not bother Hazlitt; he simply employed whichever theory of imagination he needed when he wrote of particular men. But I will return later to the question of the relationship and relative importance of the two types of imagination.

Hazlitt's description of Turner's work (1817: iv, 76n) may also, in a sense, be included in this group; the comment here is that this painter's pictures are "too much abstractions of aerial perspectives, and representations not so properly of the objects of nature as of the medium through which they are seen. They are the triumph of the knowledge of the artist, and of the power of the pencil over the barrenness of the subject." Elisabeth Schneider, in her excellent review of Hazlitt scholarship in The English Romantic Poets and Essayists (New York: New York University Press, 1966), pp. 98-99, says that "Hazlitt was surely using the term 'medium' to mean the air or atmosphere, not, as Bullitt [PQ, XXIV, 345n] reads it, the technical 'medium' of line and color." Perhaps I may be allowed to confuse the matter further with still another opinion: I take "medium," here,

II

Hazlitt's use of his two conceptions of imagination in his criticisms of particular individuals is worth noting in that it points to further patterns of thought in his writings: other qualities of perception come to be linked with the selfish or the selfless imaginative manners, and certain terms and images are characteristically used in descriptions of artists who exemplify one or the other of the generic types of perception.

"Intensity" is one of the additional qualities that is usually found in writers or artists who exemplify the selfish imagination. Writing in 1817, for example, Hazlitt says of Rousseau, whom he admired greatly: "His ideas differed from those of other men only in their force and intensity" (iv, 89); and, later in the same passage, he writes that Rousseau was marked by "intense feeling." In 1818 he points out "the intensity" of impression characteristic of

to refer to Turner's own "mental set," conditioned by his familiarity with "the technical language and difficulties of his art" (iv, 76). It is through this personal filter of training that he sees his subject; and his painting embodies this individual way of seeing things. In other words, the "medium" is the configuration of Turner's own mind, and we see more of it in the painting than we do of external nature (cf. xviii, 95 [1815]: "Artists too often chuse their subjects, not to exhibit the charms of nature, but to display their own skill in making something of the most bar-

Dante (v, 17); in the same work (Lectures on the English Poets) he states that "The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity" (v, 46). In The Spirit of the Age (1825) he says that "Intensity is the great and prominent distinction of Lord Byron's writings" (xi, 72); and of Wordsworth he writes:

He has described . . . objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared: for they have no substitute elsewhere.

(xi, 89)⁷

Hazlitt frequently uses images of heat, fire, and furnaces to help convey the impression of the intensity of such writers; a further related image which he uses is that of molding, casting, or impressing objects, as in the heat of a forge. This figure serves the further purpose of linking the quality of intensity to the selfish imagination--i.e., the self of the artist is the molding or casting agent, and therefore the finished product is highly dependent upon the purposes and intentions of that self. The "heat--mould-

ren subjects"). I believe Hazlitt is simply suggesting that the selfish or filtering imagination, rather than the selfless, is operative.

⁷See also iv, 38; v, 379; vi, 120; ix, 240, 244; x, 45, 273; xii, 269, 304; xvi, 18, 41-42, 403-404, 415; xvii, 169; xviii, 33, 114, 116, 123.



ing" image sequence is used, for example, to describe Rousseau: "The dazzling blaze of his reputation was kindled by the same fire that fed upon his vitals. . . . His speculations are the obvious exaggerations of a mind, giving loose to habitual impulses, and moulding all nature to its own purposes" (iv, 89). Dante's mind operates in this same fashion: "His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace." There is an "identity of interest" in his conception that

moulds every object to its own purposes. . . . The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves, they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become every thing by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them.

(v, 17)

In The Spirit of the Age Godwin is spoken of in similar terms:

the chains with which he rivets our attention are forged out of his own thoughts, link by link, blow for blow with glowing enthusiasm: we see the genuine ore melted in the furnace of fervid feeling, and moulded into state-ly and ideal forms.

(xi, 25)

Byron receives a similar description in the same work:

Instead of taking his impressions from without, in entire and almost unimpaired masses, he moulds them according to his own temperament, and heats the materials of his imagination in the furnace of his passions.--Lord Byron's verse glows like a flame, consuming everything in its way.

(xi, 69)

Hazlitt even uses the same diction when he speaks of poetry in general in the essay entitled "Sir Walter Scott":

It must be owned, there is a power in true poetry that lifts the mind from the ground of reality to a higher sphere, that penetrates the inert, scattered, incoherent materials presented to it, and by a force and inspiration of its own, melts and moulds them into sublimity and beauty.

(xi, 59)

A further quality that Hazlitt often links with the selfish imagination and intensity of feeling is narrowness in the scope of vision. Men who focus their awareness in a narrow range of attention thereby concentrate all of their personal energies, and such concentration nourishes intensity of feeling. The idea of "narrow focus" being important for artistic achievement and, indeed, for happiness itself, is one that Hazlitt held throughout his career. In 1814, for example, he writes that "There is a certain pedantry, a given division of labor, and almost exclusive attention to some one object, which is necessary in Art, as in all the works of man" (xviii, 41n). Three years later, in "On Pedantry," he says:

Any one settled pursuit, together with the ordinary alternations of leisure, exercise, and amusement, and the natural feelings and relations of society, is quite enough to take up the whole of our thoughts, time, and affections; and any thing beyond this will, generally speaking, only tend to dissipate and distract the mind.

(iv, 85-86)

In 1821, too, Hazlitt points out that the "requisite" for success is the want of "any idea but those of custom and interest

on the narrowest scale" (viii, 103); and he says in 1823 that "it is not necessary for one man to possess more than one quality in the highest perfection" (xi, 180). The positive aspect of narrowed focus is repeated two years later in The Spirit of the Age: "It is best to choose and act up to some one leading character, as it is best to have some settled profession or regular pursuit in life" (xi, 147); similar thoughts are found throughout the essay "On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life" in 1826 (xii, 195-209). And such ideas remained unchanged at the end of the essayist's life in 1830: "Nature is not one thing, but a variety of things, considered under different points of view; and he who seizes forcibly and happily on any one of them, does enough for fame" (xi, 229).⁸

When speaking of the narrowed focus of writers or artists who also exemplify the selfish imagination, Hazlitt often uses images to convey the idea of the funnelled nature of their perception. One such image is that of a river or channel. Such is exemplified by his statement on Wordsworth, that "The current of his feelings is deep, but narrow" (xi, 94). Elsewhere the essayist makes the same point by way of

⁸See also v, 71, 376, 379; vi, 123; vii, 79; ix, 175, 218, 220, 243; xi, 229, 278, 317; xii, 312; xvi, 139, 188, 402, 404, 408; xvii, 33, 167-168, 264, 332; xix, 83-84; xx, 92, 135, 297, 299, 391.

negation, saying that "Mr. Wordsworth is the last man to 'look abroad into universality'" (viii, 44). So it is with Chaucer: "[The interest in him] is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakespeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, . . ." (v, 52); the river, when contrasted to the sea, clearly points out Chaucer's narrowness of scope, the channelled quality of mind he shares with Wordsworth. Godwin is similar; Hazlitt speaks of him as having "valves belonging to his mind" (xi, 37) that have a channelling effect upon his energies. Rousseau, too, has this focused quality: Hazlitt speaks of the "acuteness of his observation" and of his "keen penetration" (iv, 89), the terms suggesting the narrowness and sharpness of a scalpel.

Another set of words used frequently in connection with artists of the Wordsworthian type (including such people as Byron, Rousseau, Godwin, and Dante) is a color group: the terms "colour," "tincture," and "dye." Hazlitt uses these terms to indicate an idea like the one suggested by "mould" and "cast," that the artist transforms his perceptions of an object through an investment of personal energy. He either shapes or colors what he sees according to characteristics of his own mind.⁹ Speaking of one form of genius,

⁹See above, Chapter I, pp. 21-22.

Hazlitt writes:

Genius in ordinary is a more obstinate and less versatile thing [than that of Shakespeare]. It is sufficiently exclusive and self-willed, quaint and peculiar. It does some one thing by virtue of doing nothing else: it excels in some one pursuit by being blind to all excellence but its own. It is just the reverse of theameleon; for it does not borrow, but lend its colour to all about it."
(viii, 42-43)

And in the essay on Byron in The Spirit of the Age, he refers to "The colouring of Lord Byron's style" as being "rich and dipped in Tyrian dyes" (xi, 72). So, too, Wordsworth lends "the colours of imagination to impressions" (iv, 92).

Another term that Hazlitt habitually uses in talking of these people is "egotism" (or "egotist"). Again, it is in reference to that quality of the self being impressed on all that it perceives. Things gain their importance only in reference to such a self, only when they have been "moulded" or "coloured" by the individual artist. Thus he says of Wordsworth: "he, too, like Rembrandt, has a faculty of making something out of nothing, that is, out of himself, by the medium through which he sees and with which he clothes the barrenest subject"--again, Hazlitt is more concerned with the way one sees rather than with what one sees. Continuing, he says: "[Wordsworth] is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day" solely "because he is the greatest egotist" (viii, 44). Wordsworth perceives things

through the medium of egotism, of himself; what he sees is therefore colored by his own personality. Rousseau is similar: he had "excessive egotism, which filled all objects with himself, and would have occupied the universe with his smallest interest" (iv, 89). Of Godwin Hazlitt says: "He is blind, deaf, insensible to all but the trump of Fame" (xi, 36); and this ties up intimately with what he says in "On Posthumous Fame": "To feel a strong desire that others should think highly of us, it is, in general, necessary that we should think highly of ourselves. There is something of egotism, and even pedantry, in this sentiment" (iv, 23). Godwin is, therefore, an egotist for wanting to be famous. It is interesting to note, too, that "egotism" and "pedantry" are very closely linked in Hazlitt's mind. They are not really the same thing--pedantry can be said to combine the qualities of intensity of feeling and narrowness of scope; egotism is the quality of adding personal "colour" to one's perceptions. These three distinct qualities often go together (though they do not have to--a point I shall return to)--those who are "exclusive" are very often "self-willed" and "intense," too, in Hazlitt's mind.

In addition to linking the qualities of narrow focus and intensity to the selfish imagination, Hazlitt also links their opposite counterparts to the selfless imagination: the

qualities of the second generic type of perception which he values so highly are a broad or universal range of awareness, serenity or ease of feeling, and the absence of all filters or pre-set structures in one's perception. Some of the exemplars of this type of vision are Shakespeare, Scott, Coleridge, and Jeffrey.¹⁰ And here again Hazlitt habitually uses the same diction in his assessments of different artists.

In 1817, for example, he writes that Shakespeare was "the most universal genius that ever lived" (iv, 238); earlier in the same year he had noted that "The power [Shakespeare] delights to show is not intense but discursive" (iv, 79)--i.e., covering a wide field of subjects rather than focusing on one pursuit. A year later, in "On Shakespeare and Milton," he states that "The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality . . . so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more

¹⁰ Figures such as Bacon, Steele, Knowles, and Thomson are also in this group (cf. vi, 327-328; iv, 8; xi, 184; v, 87-88) but Hazlitt devotes less attention to them. I should also mention at this point that there are frequently some contradictions in Hazlitt's descriptions of people who habitually interest him (e.g., Coleridge is sometimes said to have a structured or egotistical mind, molding perceptions according to abstract theories). But I will return to the matter of such inconsistencies in Chapters III and VI.

than another" (v, 47). In 1823, too, he praises the Bard's "infinite variety" (ix, 204).

The term "universal" is also applied to Scott in the same way it is to Shakespeare--indeed, Hazlitt uses the same quotation, "born universal heir to all humanity," to refer to both men (1821: viii, 42; 1825: xi, 69). And in The Spirit of the Age he writes that the "scope" of Scott's writing is "wide" (xi, 63), even going so far as to say that "His works (taken together) are almost like a new edition of human nature" (xi, 30). In 1830, too, he notes that Scott is "ready to converse on all subjects alike" (xi, 274).

Coleridge is another person who "walks abroad in the majesty of an universal understanding"; he is a person "of the greatest capacity" (xi, 30). Like Shakespeare, he has "discursive reason" (xi, 34); and in his poetry he "drank of the spirit of the universe" (xi, 33). "He lends himself to all impressions alike," Hazlitt says: "he gives up his mind and liberty of thought to none. He is a general lover of art and science, and wedded to no one in particular" (xi, 29). Similarly, Jeffrey shows a "great range of knowledge" and "discursiveness of reason" (xi, 130-131).¹¹

¹¹See also iv, 64, 151; v, 52, 54, 55; vi, 327-328; vii, 142, 314; viii, 29, 52; x, 303; xi, 47, 190, 275; xii, 123; xvi, 53, 59; xvii, 92, 189f., 328; xviii, 81, 113; xx, 157.

Another quality of genius of the Shakespearean type is a complete lack of tension; exemplars of this type of mind are the opposite of "intense" people of the Wordsworthian type. Thus, in "On Posthumous Fame" Hazlitt writes that "men of the greatest genius produce their works with too much facility (and, as it were, spontaneously) to require the love of fame as a stimulus to their exertions" (1817: iv, 24). Such men are completely at ease--they lack the burning fires of egotism. Scott is like this, as a contrast to Byron demonstrates: "Lord Byron's verse glows like a flame, consuming everything in its way; Sir Walter Scott's glides like a river, clear, gentle, harmless" (1825: xi, 69-70).¹² Shakespeare, too, has this serene quality--Hazlitt speaks of "the natural ease and indifference of his temper" (1818: v, 56) and of "the greatest ease and unconsciousness of effort" in his work (1830: xi, 248).¹³ Being "indifferent" to factions or narrow ways of seeing things is a description frequently applied to Shakespeare; the term usually functions on two levels,

¹²The river image as used here for Scott suggests ease of flow--the concern in this context is not for its "narrow" as opposed to "broad" characteristics. See also xi, 131, where the stream image is used to suggest Jeffrey's "copiousness and facility"; and xii, 121, where Hazlitt uses it to speak of his own style.

¹³Note that Hazlitt is talking about Shakespeare himself, not about his created characters, e.g., Lear or Othello, whom he sees as entirely separate "people." Cf. v, 50.

suggesting both ease of mind and lack of constrictions in one's perceptions. The use of the word "indifference" is a kind of description by negation--in this case it is a way of saying that Shakespeare lacks the passionately self-willed involvement with a subject that people like Byron or Rousseau demonstrate. Coleridge is similarly indifferent; we have already seen that he is a "general" lover of art and science, "and wedded to no one in particular." His "ease" is also suggested in another reference, that he "drank of the spirit of the universe, and wandered at eve by fairy stream or fountain" (xi, 33). To "wander" is to move about without any set direction in mind--to be utterly free to go anywhere without being channelled to a fixed course; and a certain leisureliness is also connoted. Jeffrey, too, exhibits "unpretending carelessness and simplicity"; and his style shows great "rapidity," "facility," "flow," and "ease" (xi, 134, 130-132). And the same ease that Hazlitt sees in such writers is also evident elsewhere--the essayist admires it in such diverse subjects as the Indian Jugglers (viii, 78, 80, 87), the Elgin marbles (xvi, 353), and Mrs. Siddons' acting (xviii, 278).¹⁴

¹⁴See also iv, 53; v, 88; vi, 163; viii, 283, 316; ix, 237-241; x, 44, 61, 67; xi, 47, 60, 134, 248, 248n; xii, 92, 329; xvi, 12, 49, 188, 318; xviii, 81, 113; xx, 153, 243.

Those who have both universality of awareness and ease of feeling usually exemplify the selfless imagination-- they do not tamper with the objects or relations they perceive; they impose no coloring or structuring of their own. Thus, Hazlitt says that Shakespeare was one

who did not tamper with nature or warp her to his own purposes; who 'knew all qualities with a learned spirit,' instead of judging them by his own predilections; and was rather 'a pipe for the Muse's finger to play what stop she pleased,' than anxious to set up any character or pretensions of his own.

(1821: viii, 42)

Such a mind serves as a transparent medium through which nature appears directly. Indeed, Hazlitt uses the terms "clear" and "transparent" (as opposed to "coloured," "tintured," etc.) in talking of Scott's qualities. We have already seen in passing that Scott's verse "glides like a river, clear, gentle, harmless"; the contrast to Lord Byron (in the essay on Byron from The Spirit of the Age) states the idea more explicitly:

The colouring of Lord Byron's style, however rich and dipped in Tyrian dyes, is nevertheless opaque, is in itself an object of delight and wonder: Sir Walter Scott's is perfectly transparent. In studying the one, you seem to gaze at the figures cut in stained glass, which excludes the view beyond, and where the pure light of heaven is only a means of setting off the gorgeousness of art: in reading the other, you look through a noble window at the clear and varied landscape without.

(xi, 72)

It is worth noting, further, that in the first quotation

above on Scott, "clear" is linked to "gentle" and "harmless"; in the second, "clear" is linked with "varied"--the three qualities of clarity (or lack of perceptual filters), tranquility, and universality are often closely linked in Hazlitt's mind, just as their opposing qualities are often connected in the opposite type of perception.

Coleridge, too, as we might expect, is selfless; referring to him as one of those "Persons of the greatest capacity," Hazlitt says of this group: "surveying themselves from the highest point of view, amidst the infinite variety of the universe, their own share in it seems trifling, and scarce worth a thought" (1825: xi, 30). Such selflessness prevents him from imposing structures upon his perceptions--he "can act only on spontaneous impulses without object or method" (xi, 36). Structures of any sort are bad in this way of seeing--anything that molds or casts one's perceptions is to be avoided, just as "colouring" is to be shunned. Thus Shakespeare is praised because in his dialogues "Nothing is made out by formal inference or analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature" (1818: v, 50).¹⁵ The literary devices of climax, anthithesis, etc., are seen as confining structures or molds

¹⁵In qualifying this assertion by adding "or seems to come," Hazlitt is probably mindful of the operation of

of thought--and are therefore considered to be undesirable in this perspective. Indeed, one of Hazlitt's objections to Dr. Johnson is precisely the fact that he has such structures in his criticism: "All his ideas were cast in a given mould, in a set form: they were made out by rule and system, by climax, inference, and antithesis:--Shakespeare's were the reverse" (1817: iv, 175).

Hazlitt often speaks of minds of the Shakespearean type as being free from "bigotry" or "bias," the condition of having a fixed way of seeing things or of screening out certain possibilities of perception. Thus Shakespeare's mind "contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another" (v, 47); so, too, the Bard "had none of the bigotry of his age" (v, 56). Similarly, Jeffrey is "neither a bigot nor an enthusiast," and "He is not wedded to any dogma" (xi, 130), whereas people like Dante and Milton are--they share a "spirit of partisanship" (v, 66).

Much value therefore lies in certain men of genius imposing no personal colors or structures upon their visions

/the understanding as opposed to the imagination. Thus Shakespeare's mind can indeed arrange the physical data of sense perception according to the "moulds" of his understanding while--more importantly--he refrains from clouding perceived values by imaginative tampering. See above, Chapter I, pp. 7-9.

of the outside world. Indeed, not only do they impose nothing of their own, but they actually tear off old perspectives. Thus, speaking of Scott's novels and romances, Hazlitt says:

The grand secret of the author's success in these latter productions is that he has completely got rid of the trammels of authorship; and torn off at one rent . . . all the ornaments of fine writing and worn out sentimentality. All is fresh, as from the hand of nature.

(xi, 61)

Such work is particularly significant to a reader because it serves the function of stripping him of his set ways of seeing things, of his own prejudices, biases, and egotistical perspectives:

【Scott】 draws aside the curtain, and the veil of egotism¹⁶ is rent . . . he expands and lightens reflection, and takes away that tightness at the breast which arises from thinking or wishing to think that there is nothing in the world out of a man's self!--in this point of view, the Author of Waverley is one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived,¹⁷ by emancipating

¹⁶The "veil" or "curtain" image is one that Hazlitt frequently uses to indicate constricted perception or colored awareness. See iv, 74; v, 10; vi, 176; viii, 6; xi, 54, 71; xii, 122, 129; xvi, 53; xvii, 314.

¹⁷For the same reasons, Shakespeare is "not only one of the greatest poets, but one of the greatest moralists we have" (xii, 245). Note, however, that Hazlitt's view of the moral aspect of art is part of a larger critical concern. Even though he is often classically oriented in his criticism (approaching art as an imitation or embodiment of external values in nature), he is, from another point of view, romantic

the mind from petty, narrow, and bigoted prejudices.
(xi, 71-72)¹⁸

The diction is of course significant: "egotism," "tightness," "narrow," "bigoted," and "prejudiced" are characteristically opposed to such terms as "expands," "lightens," and "emancipating." It is also interesting that Hazlitt specifies "In this point of view," which indicates his conscious awareness of the other point of view, that based on the selfish imagination.

in that his major concern is actually one step removed--i.e., he approaches art as the perception of an individual which allows for (or prevents) imitation of nature. Using Abrams' scheme from The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 6-7, I would say that Hazlitt's primary emphasis in his artistic theory is placed upon the role of the artist. Thus, he saw even Shakespeare's plays as, in a sense, expressions of a unique personality--this personality, however, was one of utter selflessness and "transparency." A lesser emphasis (i.e., less often expressed, but strong when it is verbalized) is placed on the (moral) effect of art on an audience--i.e., the method of perception which art creates in a reader or viewer. Differing weights of importance are placed on the external universe--at one time it is the objective source of perceived values; at another, it is not objective but plastic or neutral and receptive of personal investments of value. At still other times it occupies a middle ground; as Abrams notes (p. 52), Hazlitt sometimes combines the "mirror" with a "lamp." He is simply inconsistent on this point.

Regarding the last element in Abrams' scheme, Hazlitt was never much concerned with the formalities of art works themselves. He "typically applies his criticism, not to the analysis of design, ordonnance, and the inter-relations of parts, but to the representation in words of the aesthetic qualities and feeling-tones of a work of art" (p. 135).

¹⁸See also xii, 320, where Scott is said to have "a perfect indifference to self."

Shakespeare, Scott, and men of their type are important because they restore us to nature; they make our vision fresh again, as if we were seeing the world for the first time. This is the type of vision Hazlitt admires so much in his essay "Romeo and Juliet"--the vision of as yet uncorrupted youth:

What is it that in youth sheds a dewy light round the evening star? That makes the daisy look so bright? That perfumes the hyacinth? That embalms the first kiss of love? It is the delight of novelty, and the seeing no end to the pleasure that we fondly believe is still in store for us.

(1817: iv, 250)

"Novelty" suggests that no habitual or set ways of perception have yet developed; "seeing no end" is tantamount to saying "seeing no constrictions or barriers," which is the important quality of being free and open to the universal range of all possible experience. Hazlitt admires this same type of fresh vision in his description of Adam and Eve (from Paradise Lost), who were literally seeing the world for the first time:

In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed in beauty in their sight.

(1818: v, 67)

"In their sight" suggests that the way they see, more specifically than what they see, is what Hazlitt considers to be important. And the several superlatives ("all," "full," "all")

suggest that, as yet, no limitations of any kind have become attached to their way of seeing.

People with such fresh vision are the opposite of "egotists," "egotism" being the term used in connection with writers of the Wordsworthian type. Shakespeare is thus not an egotist--a point which Hazlitt makes in several different essays (e.g., iv, 23-24; v, 47; xi, 92). So it is with Scott, too, by whom "the veil of egotism is rent" (xi, 71). And Hazlitt also carefully specifies that "Mr. Coleridge talks of himself, without being an egotist, for in him the individual is always merged in the abstract and general" (xi, 31). The term is therefore another which signals a sharp division between the two types of perception Hazlitt is delineating. The concept is also often expressed as in "On Shakespeare and Milton"; here, referring to Shakespeare, Hazlitt writes that "by an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself" (v, 50). Those who see with such vision "lose" themselves, or "go out" of themselves¹⁹--they leave behind the habitual structures the self must normally have in order to function in the everyday world.

¹⁹See also i, 39; ii, 239; ix, 213; xvi, 67, 91-92; xvii, 338.

III

Hazlitt thus distinguished two general types of perception, and he used the various elements involved as standards of value throughout his writing career. It was probably these opposites that he had in mind when, looking back on his writings of twenty-three years, he wrote the comment used as the epigram for this chapter:

I hardly ever set about a paragraph or a criticism, but there was an undercurrent of thought, or some generic distinction on which the whole turned. Having got my clue, I had no difficulty stringing pearls upon it.

(xvii, 312)

It is interesting that Hazlitt perceived essentially the same "undercurrent of thought" in so many different objects at so many points in his career. Though he would flesh out the oppositions he perceived in many different and unique ways, he habitually and consciously made use of the same skeletal structures of thought. In 1814, for example, he writes:

Poetry may be properly divided into two classes: the poetry of imagination and the poetry of sentiment. The one consists in the power of calling up images of the most pleasing or striking kind; the other depends on the strength of interest which it excites in given objects. The one may be said to arise out of the faculties of memory and invention, conversant with the world of external nature; the other from the fund of our moral sensibility.

(xix, 18)

Though he uses the word "imagination" here in an unusually re-

stricted sense, he is, nevertheless, still using the opposition first noticeable in the Essay on the Principles of Human Action: one can either perceive value which resides in external objects, or one can personally create it and invest it in such objects. A similar distinction underlies his comments on the classical and the romantic styles of art--the former describes things "as they are interesting in themselves"; the latter, things as they are made interesting by personal associations (1816: xvi, 63). Using "imagination" in another restricted sense, he writes in 1820 that "The two principles of imitation and imagination, indeed, are not only distinct, but almost opposite" (vi, 350).²⁰ Two years earlier he had again used his opposite qualities, saying that Wordsworth "is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses" (v, 156); similarly, Wordsworth and Shakespeare are "the antipodes of each other" (1824: xvi, 253). Contrasts of Marlowe and Heywood (vi, 211f.), Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher (vi, 250), Paine and Cobbett (viii, 51-52), Titian and Domenichino (x,

²⁰The qualification of "almost" may again indicate Hazlitt's belief that even in strict "imitation" there is always some "moulding" done by the understanding. See footnote 15, above.

328), Mackintosh and Coleridge (xi, 100), Raphael and Guido (xii, 284), Mme. Pasta and Mlle. Mars (xii, 324f.), Moore and Byron (xvi, 411f.), Kemble's conception of Hamlet vs. Hazlitt's (xviii, 199), Scott and Rizzio (xviii, 350), Pope and the poets of nature (xx, 90f.) and countless others²¹ bring out one or more oppositions of the selfish vs. the selfless imagination, broadness vs. narrowness of scope, and intensity vs. ease of feeling.

While it is true that Hazlitt placed great emphasis on his generic contrasts, it is also true that he always further specified his analyses to distinguish individuals within the broad classifications. His specific criticisms are just that--they are each unique. But since below the generic level they do not tend to repeat themselves from one essay to the next, it is beyond the scope of this study to pursue hundreds of such individual criticisms in detail. A few examples, though, will indicate some of the differences between generically similar people.

Godwin and Wordsworth, for instance, are both intense men, "egotists" of narrow focus; but on a more specific level they are very different. Godwin appealed to men's reason alone, ignoring human imperfections and passions in his moral

²¹Note xi, 277-278, and xvi, 402, in particular.

system--"he raised the standard of morality above the reach of humanity" and gave "no quarter to the amiable weaknesses of our nature, nor [did] he stoop to avail himself of the supplementary aids of an imperfect virtue" (xi, 18-19). In advocating the "omnipotence of reason" he assumed "but one class, of ideas or motives, the highest and least attainable possible" (xix, 304). Despite the impracticality of his morality, though, Hazlitt greatly admired Godwin's ideas, directed as they were to the ends of human liberty and political reform. Godwin made a major contribution to human thought, Hazlitt believed, in that by straining reason to its limits as a motivating force for moral action, he thereby "pointed out the limit or line of separation, between what is practicable and what is barely conceivable." By "imposing impossible tasks on the naked strength of the will, he has discovered how far it is or is not in our power to dispense with the illusions of sense, to resist the calls of affection, to emancipate ourselves from the force of habit." Godwin's discovery of the borders of such possibility was a great accomplishment, Hazlitt believed, because it ultimately enabled others to place "the Gothic structure of human virtue on an humbler, but a wider and safer foundation than it had hitherto occupied in the volumes and systems of the learned" (xi, 23-24).

Hazlitt recognized that reason by itself could not

much affect men: "the levers with which we must work out our regeneration are not the cobwebs of the brain," he wrote in 1824, "but the warm, palpitating fibres of the human heart" (xvi, 268).²² He found a correspondent awareness in Wordsworth, who "communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man"--"no one," he says, "has displayed the same pathos in treating of the simplest feelings of the heart" (xi, 89, 88).²³ Wordsworth's concern for the simple but fundamental passions thus clearly separates him from Godwin. But, while Hazlitt praises Wordsworth's pursuit of his "new avenue to the human heart" (viii, 45) in his poetry, he repeatedly berates the poet for his later reactionary political views. In this respect, too, Wordsworth is the opposite of Godwin, who was, to Hazlitt's dismay, left behind by the times as his liberal supporters

²² See also xii, 324 (1826): "When we appeal to a man's reason against his inclinations, we speak a language without meaning, and which he will not understand."

²³ Godwin "does not stoop to avail himself of the supplementary aids of an imperfect virtue," says Hazlitt (above). Quoting Northcote (xi, 211), he writes:

"Nature is satisfied with imperfect instruments. Instead of snarling at every thing that differs from us we had better take Shakespeare's advice, and try to find 'Tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.'"

This is what Wordsworth does--the same quotation from As You Like It is applied to him in "On Genius and Common Sense" (viii, 44).

went on to become Tories.²⁴

Coleridge, as another instance, is different in various respects from Scott or Shakespeare--most notably in that his universal range of awareness tended to work against him:

The fault of Mr. Coleridge is, that he comes to no conclusion. He is a man of that universality of genius that his mind hangs suspended between poetry and prose, truth and falsehood, and an infinity of other things, and from an excess of capacity, he does little or nothing.

(xix, 32)

Hazlitt recognized that Coleridge had the same qualities of mind as Shakespeare; indeed, he said of Coleridge in 1818 that "he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius" (v, 167). He could also see, though, that Coleridge's particular character made him too weak to effectively utilize his great gifts. "The man of perhaps the greatest ability now living" (xii, 198) could not produce results like the other geniuses of his type; Coleridge wasted his gifts by "swallowing doses of oblivion" (xi, 34). Nevertheless, Hazlitt ultimately tended to judge him kindly, despite his ineffectuality. "Mr. Coleridge's works," he says in The Spirit of the Age, "injure instead of conveying a just

²⁴Other examples of distinctions within this class of writers may be found in comparisons of Wordsworth and Rousseau (iv, 92) and Wordsworth and Byron (xix, 36).

idea of the man, for he himself is certainly in the first class of general intellect" (xi, 35).

Shakespeare and Scott, as another instance, are also distinct figures in Hazlitt's thought. They share the qualities of the selfless imagination, ease of manner, and great range or variety of scope;²⁵ however, they have an important difference, which Hazlitt spells out in "Sir Walter Scott, Racine, and Shakespear" (xii, 336-346). In this essay he objects to the implied assertions of "a French lady" that Scott "imitates nature in the same way" as Shakespeare; the point he makes is that the dramatist presents nature more fully and deeply. Shakespeare identifies with the "instinctive law of our nature"; he seizes on "the ruling passion" of his subject, and "evolves all the rest from it." He sympathizes with and enters into the internal processes of nature without falsifying or distorting them; he then organically extends the operation of these principles within his subjects. His characters thus act from internal motivations. Shakespeare is thus "a half-worker with nature"; he simply sets in motion the principles of nature which he finds all about him. He

²⁵ Scott resembles Shakespeare in that "he thinks of his characters and never of himself, and pours out his works with such unconscious ease and prodigality of resources that he thinks nothing of them and is even greater than his own fame" (This from the end of "Sir Walter Scott, Racine, and Shakespear": xii, 346).

does not change, alter, modify, or impose his own personal character upon his subjects; rather, he discovers the individual internal processes of each, enters selflessly into them, and impels the operation of these principles from the inside. Scott, on the other hand, simply presents the external aspects of his subjects: "He lays an embargo on 'all appliances and means to boot,' on history, tradition, local scenery, costume and manners, and makes his characters chiefly up of these"--he "transcribes" rather than enters into his material. Like Shakespeare, he does not distort his material by imposing his own personal characteristics and values upon it; Scott's "matter-of-fact imagination" though, is content to present subjects from a distance. He can tell us of nature and the world, but he does not show us like Shakespeare: "The genius of Shakespear is dramatic, that of Scott narrative or descriptive." "Whenever Sir Walter comes to a truly dramatic situation, he declines it or fails"--Scott can only record his material, not impel it. Hazlitt's conceptions of these two writers are thus quite distinct: "Sir Walter Scott gives us the external imagery or machinery or passion; Shakespear the soul"; "The one gives us what we can see and hear; the other what we are." And the difference is vital to an understanding of the essayist's immense love

of Shakespeare.

Hazlitt often links the three qualities of selfish imagination, narrowness of scope, and intensity of feeling together, just as he often links the three opposite qualities with each other. When he talks of any one quality specifically, then, he often means to imply the presence of one or both of its usual concomitants. He writes, for example, of the close interrelationship of Scott's qualities:

There are two things I admire in Sir Walter, his capacity and his simplicity, which indeed I am apt to think are much the same. The more ideas a man has of other things, the less he is taken up with the idea of himself."

(1830: xi, 276)

Continuing, a few paragraphs later, he writes:

So, in general, writers of the greatest imagination and range of ideas, and who might be said to have all nature obedient to their call, seem to have been most careless of their fame and regardless of their works. They treat their productions not as children, but as 'bastards of their art;' whereas those who are more confined in their scope of intellect and wedded to some one theory or predominant fancy, have been found to feel a proportionable fondness for the offspring of their brain, and have thus excited a deeper interest in it in the minds of others. we set a value on things as they have cost us dear: the very limitation of our faculties or exclusiveness of our feelings compels us to concentrate all our enthusiasm on a favorable subject; and strange as it may sound, in order to inspire a perfect sympathy in others or to form a school, men must themselves be egotists! Milton has had fewer readers and admirers, but I suspect more devoted and bigotted ones, than ever Shakespeare had: Sir Walter Scott has attracted more universal attention than any other writer of our time, but you may speak against him with less dan-

ger of making personal enemies than if you attack Lord Byron.

The passage indicates Hazlitt's own understanding of the dynamics by which his six generic qualities tend to be found in two opposite sets.

They are not always so linked, however. He says that Milton, for example, has an intense, forceful quality (iv, 38; v, 58, 61), and that he also imposes his own perspectives upon his material: "So Milton has borrowed more than almost any other writer; but he has uniformly stamped a character of his own upon it" (xx, 301; see also v, 230). However, as the first clause of this quotation suggests, the essayist does not characterize Milton's range of awareness as narrow, which we might expect. Rather, it is extensive--a point emphasized by a contrast to Pope: "Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again" (xix, 83). Milton, then, does not (here) exemplify the usual combination of qualities.

Neither, for that matter, does Pope. His world of concern is narrow (above; see also v, 71; xix, 84), and he imposes his own characteristics upon what he sees (v, 80). But Pope is not an "intense" or forceful poet--his manner

is marked by "ease" rather than "enthusiasm" (v, 71; xix, 84; xx, 92). It is wise therefore not to consider Hazlitt's use of oppositions as the simple workings of a mechanical system, for he sometimes fluidly combines the generic qualities in a variety of ways.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTRADICTIONS

"It is said, I know, that truth is one; but to this I cannot subscribe, for it appears to me that truth is many.

There are as many truths as there are things and causes of action and contradictory principles at work in society."
(1807: vii, 308)

Hazlitt often uses his characteristic oppositions of thought to create balance and tension in essays; sometimes, however, he also creates inconsistencies and contradictions. Commentators such as Paul Elmer More have noted "the innumerable contradictions that occur in his work."¹ These discrepancies are, however, not totally haphazard and unpredictable; there is an internal pattern to them. First of all, they usually involve a limited number of ideas--Hazlitt does not contradict himself on just any topic; when he does do so, the situations almost always involve his use of the same few generic qualities of perception we have already distinguished. And second, when such inconsistencies do occur, he is

¹Shelburne Essays (2nd series; New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1909), p. 75.

usually doing one of two things: he may be discerning qualities in a particular subject opposite to those which he usually sees in it; or he may be seeing negative value in a particular quality which elsewhere he sees as positive--and by extension of this, he may rank one whole type of perception above the other at one point, and, at another, reverse his idea of their relative values.

In Scott, for example, Hazlitt saw contradictory qualities of mind exemplified. Scott's novels and romances demonstrated the workings of an imagination not taken up with itself, its concern being rather with presenting an undistorted view of the whole range of human experience. But, in contrast to these literary productions, his political life demonstrated just the opposite qualities; and in The Spirit of the Age Hazlitt hit with deadly force at the bigotry, prejudice, and narrow-mindedness that made the novelist a stumbling block in the road to social reform:

If there were a writer, who 'born for the universe'--
 '--Narrow'd his mind,

And to party gave up what was meant for mankind--' who, from the height of his genius looking abroad into nature, and scanning the recesses of the human heart, 'winked and shut his apprehension up' to every thought or purpose that tended to the future good of mankind-- . . . who, amiable, frank, friendly, manly in private life, was seized with the dotage of age and the fury of a woman, the instant politics were concerned--who reserved all his candor and comprehensiveness of view for history, and vented his lit-

tleness, pique, resentment, bigotry, and intolerance on his contemporaries-- . . . who, the moment his own interest or the prejudices of others interfered, seemed to forget all that was due to the pride of intellect, to the sense of manhood-- . . . who being (by common consent), the finest, the most humane and accomplished writer of his age, associated himself with and encouraged the lowest panders of a venal press; . . . showing no remorse, no relenting or compassion towards the victims of the nefarious and organized system of party-proscription, carried on under the mark of literary criticism and fair discussion, insulting the misfortunes of some, and trampling on the early grave of others--

'Who would not grieve is such a man there be?

Who would not weep if Atticus were he?'

(xi, 67-68)²

Like Scott, Coleridge, too, is sometimes criticized for showing a "bigotted and exclusive" spirit (xii, 101-102); however, Hazlitt sees these faults in his poetry as well as in his politics. His verse is sometimes said to be marred by its passing through filters of "trancendental theories" and "scholastic speculations" (xi, 30; xviii, 309); it is thus not true to nature and external realities. And in a Plain Speaker essay Coleridge is criticized for having more concern

²See also x, 254-255, where Scott is referred to as an "understrapper of greatness and of titles, himself since titled, the scale of whose intellect can be equalled by nothing but the pitifulness and rancour of his prejudices." While it is true that Hazlitt occasionally discerns prejudices in Scott's novels, these, somewhat paradoxically, have the effect of giving fresh sight to contemporary readers-- i.e., Scott "goes back to old prejudices and superstitions as a relief to the modern reader" (xi, 76). As Hazlitt says elsewhere in The Spirit of the Age, "Antiquity after a time has the grace of novelty" (xi, 178).

for himself than for his subject: "he owes everything to his own mind. His object is to invent; he scorns to imitate" (xii, 15). This, of course, brands him as one who derives value from his own mind rather than from outside objects. The blocks and filters in his perception are assailed elsewhere, too; in a letter to The Examiner in 1817, Hazlitt accuses Coleridge and Southey of tying down men's consciences in "rusty fetters"; the sharp ad hominem attack also cites a "disgusting display of egotism" on Coleridge's part (xix, 197-198). There are, then, contradictions to the portrait of the man given in The Spirit of the Age; one gets the impression, however, that the Spirit portrait is Hazlitt's most mature assessment. While the vitriolic attacks of 1816 and 1817, motivated by political hatred and spilling over into literary criticism, may portray Coleridge as a narrow-minded bigot, Hazlitt's later, more seasoned judgment of the man makes him out to be greater than this. In 1825, the essayist concentrates on the positive, Shakespearean qualities of his mind; he even separates him from the apostasy of the rest of the Lake School, saying that Coleridge "did not enter with them" into the safe world of political pensions and laureateships, that he stayed behind, "pitching his tent upon the barren waste without, and having no abiding place nor city of

refuge" (xi, 38).

While Hazlitt's views on Coleridge show his discernment of opposite qualities in one subject, they also point out another type of inconsistency--that qualities which he admires on some occasions are the very ones which he criticizes on others. Thus, for example, he admires those who "look abroad into universality" and criticizes those whose minds are too narrow to do so.³ But, as we have seen, he frequently takes the opposite stance as well, pointing out the disadvantages of a broad range of awareness and the benefits of focusing one's attention on a single pursuit: "A multiplicity of objects unsettles the mind, and destroys not only all enthusiasm, but all sincerity of attachment and constancy of pursuit" (iv, 84).⁴ And we have also seen that Hazlitt sometimes criticizes Coleridge from this point of view, showing that the advantage of his type of genius may also be its weakness.⁵

Even Shakespeare does not escape criticism on this account:

The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. . . . If he had been

³See viii, 44; xi, 16; xii, 123; xviii, 304; xx, 157.

⁴See above, Chapter II, pp. 35f.

⁵See above, Chapter II, p. 56.

only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater.

(v, 55-56)⁶

The passage continues, criticizing the playwright for his "ease"; here, his lack of intensity is seen as a fault rather than as a virtue:

The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places. . . . His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill.⁷

Wordsworth's qualities, too, may be either virtues or defects, depending on one's point of view: "his strength lies in his weakness" (xi, 94) is a comment that implies Hazlitt's own practice of shifting between opposite and contradictory viewpoints.

Hazlitt has opposite views on even such a matter as prejudice--prejudice being the imposition of personal filters in perception that prevent the mind from seeing the world as it is "in itself." His attacks on bigotry are too numerous to need citation; however, it should be noted that he sometimes praises exactly what he so often condemns: "To take away the force of habit and prejudice

⁶Repeated at xvi, 92n.

⁷See also iv, 225: "perhaps Shakespear was too volatile and heedless." There follows a negative reference to his "careless force."

entirely, is to strike at the root of our personal existence," he says in The Round Table (iv, 84), in the very year (1817) he so savagely attacks the Lake poets. He makes another such statement, for example, in 1823: "No wise man can have a contempt for the prejudices of others; and he should even stand in a certain awe of his own, as if they were aged parents and monitors. They may in the end prove wiser than he" (ix, 189).⁸

A classic example of Hazlitt's inconsistency may be found in his different comparisons of Sir Walter Scott and William Godwin; he has this to say of the two in the essay "William Godwin" in The Spirit of the Age (1825):

It is the beauty and the charm of Mr. Godwin's descriptions that the reader identifies himself with the author, and the secret of this is, that the author has identified himself with his personages. Indeed, he has created them. They are the proper issue of his brain, lawfully begot, not foundlings, nor the 'bastards of his art.' He is not an indifferent, callous spectator of the scenes which he himself portrays, but without seeming to feel them. There is no look of patch-work and plagiarism, the beggarly copiousness of borrowed wealth; no tracery-work from worm-eaten manuscripts, from forgotten chronicles, nor piecing out of vague traditions with gaudy staring transparency, in which you cannot distinguish the daubing of the painter from the light that shines through the flimsy colours and gives them brilliancy. Here all is clearly made out with strokes of the pencil, by fair, not factitious means. Our author [Godwin] takes a given subject from nature and

⁸For other examples see vii, 306; xvi, 332; xx, 97, 102.

from books, and then fills it up with the ardent workings of his own mind, with the teeming and audible pulses of his own art. The effect is entire and satisfactory in proportion. The work (so to speak) and the author are one. We are not puzzled to decide upon their respective pretensions. In reading Mr. Godwin's novels, we know what share of merit the author has in them. In reading the Scotch Novels, we are perpetually embarrassed in asking ourselves this question; and perhaps it is not altogether a false modesty that prevents the editor from putting his name on the title-page--he is (for any thing that we know to the contrary) only a more voluminous sort of Allen-a-Dale. At least, we may claim this advantage for the English author [Godwin] that the chains with which he rivets our attention are forged out of his own thoughts, link by link, blow for blow, with glowing enthusiasm: we see the genuine ore melted in the furnace of fervid feeling, and moulded into stately and ideal forms; and this is so far better than peeping into an old iron shop, or pilfering from a dealer in marine stores!

(xi, 24-25)

Despite the rhetorical exaggeration in the passage which goes to extremes in sacrificing Scott on the altar of Godwin's praise, the underlying criteria of Hazlitt's distinction are clear enough. Godwin is favored here because of his intensity of feeling and his imposition of his own forms and energies upon his work; he is not "indifferent" like Scott, and in this instance he is therefore "far better." Hazlitt criticizes the Scotch novelist because his works lack the definite personal moldings that Godwin exhibits--Scott's "patchwork" of "chronicles," "tradition," and "borrowed" wealth shows that his concern is for his subject and not for himself. And in this passage, such selfless imagination is an undesirable quality.

We get a different opinion of Scott in the essay "On the English Novelists" from Hazlitt's Lectures on the Comic Writers (1819); here, he says of Scott's work:

In knowledge, in variety, in facility, in truth of painting, in costume and scenery, in freshness of subject and in untired interest, in glancing lights and the graces of a style passing at will from grave to gay, from lively to severe, at once romantic and familiar, having utmost force of imitation and apparent freedom of invention; these novels have the highest claims to admiration. What lack they yet? The author has all power given him from without--he has not, perhaps, an equal power from within. The intensity of the feeling is not equal to the distinctness of the imagery. He sits like a magician in his cell, and conjures up all shapes and sights to the view In the midst of all this phantasmagoria, the author himself never appears to take part with his characters, to prompt our affection to the good, or sharpen our antipathy to the bad. It is the perfection of art to conceal art; and this is here done so completely, that while it adds to our pleasure in the work, it seems to take away from the merit of the author. As he does not thrust himself forward in the foreground, he loses the crédit of the performance. The copies are so true to nature, that they appear like tapestry figures taken off by the pattern; the obvious patch-work of tradition and history. His characters are transplanted at once from their native soil to the page which we are reading, without any traces of their having passed through the hot-bed of the author's genius or vanity. He leaves them as he found them; but this is doing wonders. The Laird of Bradwardine, the idiot rhymer David Gellatly, Miss Rose Bradwardine, . . . and Meg Merrilees, are at present 'familiar in our mouths as household names,' and whether they are actual persons or creations of the poet's pen, is an impertinent inquiry.

(vi, 128-129)

But it is this same impertinent inquiry that forms the basis of his criticism of Scott in the essay "William Godwin."

There, Scott suffers, being criticized with the same diction

that is here used to praise him. The present passage continues into a consideration of Godwin; and in this essay both men are praised, though, of course, on the basis of opposite qualities. As the essayist himself says in the next paragraph:

Whoever else is, it is pretty clear that the author of Caleb Williams and St. Leon is not the author of Waverley. Nothing can be more distinct or excellent in their several ways than these two writers. If the one owes almost every thing to external observation and traditional character, the other owes every thing to internal conception and contemplation of the possible workings of the human mind. There is very little knowledge of the world, little variety, neither an eye for the picturesque, nor a talent for the humorous in Caleb Williams, for instance, but you cannot doubt for a moment of the originality of the work and the force of the conception. The impression made upon the reader is the exact measure of the strength of the author's genius.

(vi, 130)

There is yet another comparison of Godwin and Scott in a third essay, entitled "Mr. Godwin," contributed to the Edinburgh Review in 1830. Speaking of Godwin's novel Cloudesly, Hazlitt writes:

The plot is borrowed from a real event that took place concerning a disputed succession in the middle of the last century, and which gave birth not long after to a novel of the title Annesley. We should like to meet with a copy of this work, in order to see how a writer of less genius [than Godwin] would get to the end of his task, and carry the reader along with him without the aid of those subtle researches and lofty declamations with which Mr. Godwin has supplied the place of facts and circumstances. The published trial, we will hazard a conjecture, has more 'mark and likelihood in it.'

(xvi, 400-401)

Hazlitt is critical of Godwin here--Godwin, he maintains, is supplying "declamations" of his own in place of "facts and circumstances"; he is covering over the external reality with the workings of his own mind. And, in the present context, this is a negative quality. (The reference to the author of Annesley having "less genius" than Godwin is ironic, since Godwin is being criticized in comparison with him.) Hazlitt then immediately continues by setting off Godwin's fault in contrast to the excellence of another writer--Scott:

This is the beauty of Sir Walter Scott: he takes a legend or an actual character as he finds it, while other writers think they have not performed their engagements and acquitted themselves with applause, till they have slobbered over the plain face of nature with paint and varnish of their own. They conceive the truth is a plagiarism, and the thing as it happened a forgery and imposition on the public. They stand right before their subject, and say, 'Nay, but hear me first.' We know no other merit in the Author of Waverley than that he is never this opaque, obtrusive body, getting in the way and eclipsing the sun of truth and nature, which shines with broad universal light through the different works. If we were to describe the secret of this author's success in three words, we should say, that it consists in the absence of egotism.

The passage speaks for itself. It is especially interesting, though, in that, when matched with the other Godwin-Scott comparisons, it readily underscores Hazlitt's inconsistency in the use of his polar values. In one essay, Godwin is "far better" and Scott is a source of perpetual embarrassment; in another, both authors are praised; in a third, Scott is

praised highly and Godwin is heavily criticized. And in each instance the comparison of the two writers is made on exactly the same grounds: the opposite qualities of mind they exhibit.⁹

Hazlitt was aware of such inconsistencies in his writing, and in his polemical Letter to William Gifford (1819) he defends himself by saying:

my love of paradox may, I think, be accounted for from the necessity of counteracting the obstinacy of prejudice. If I have been led to carry a remark too far, it was because others would not allow it to have any force at all. My object was to show the latent operation of some unsuspected principle, and I therefore took only some one view of that particular subject. I was chiefly anxious that the germ of thought should be true and original; that I should put others in possession of what I meant, and then left it to find its level in the operation of common sense, and to have its excesses corrected by other causes. The principle will be found true, even where the application is extravagant or partial. I have not been wedded to my particular speculations with the spirit of a partisan. I wrote for instance an Essay on Pedantry, to qualify the extreme contempt into which it has fallen, and to shew the necessary advantage of an absorption of the whole mind in some favourite study, and I wrote an Essay on the Ignorance of the Learned to lessen the undue admiration of Learning, and shew that it is not everything.

(ix, 30)

"The latent operation of some unsuspected principle" is, like

⁹Note, then, the unintentional irony of a comment made in 1824:

"Nothing provokes me more than these exclusive and invidious comparisons, which seek to raise one man of genius by setting down another, and which suppose that there is nothing to admire in the greatest talents, unless they can be made a foil to bring out weak points or nominal imperfections of some fancied rival."

(xvi, 295)

the "generic distinction" upon which he strings pearls,¹⁰ a reference to this customary oppositions. Hazlitt's mind habitually worked with the tensions of contrasting elements; as he says in his Characteristics (1823), "There is a natural principle of antithesis in the human mind. We seldom grant one excellence but we hasten to make up for it by a contrary defect, to keep the balance of criticism even" (ix, 180). The reason for this habitual practice is precisely his belief that there is indeed "a natural principle of antithesis" in the human mind itself; specifically, there is an antithesis in the operation of the faculty of imagination. Hence, Hazlitt's famous dictum: "Truth is not one, but many; and an observation may be true in itself that contradicts another equally true, according to the point of view from which we contemplate the subject" (ix, 228). The human mind is capable of shifting--and does shift--between the selfless point of view and an infinite variety of filtered or individual points of view; but, for Hazlitt, as long as the "warm, palpitating fibres of the human heart" are involved--no matter what contradictions may result--then there, too, is truth.¹¹

¹⁰ See above, Chapter II, p. 51.

¹¹ See Chapter VI, below, for further discussion of the overall relationship of Hazlitt's opposite types of per-

ception.

For other statements in opposition to each other, see also the following:

1a) Favorable references to "intensity" or criticisms of "ease": i, 125; v, 85, 151, 379; viii, 30; ix, 240, 244; x, 45, 52, 273; xi, 131-132; xii, 269, 304; xvi, 18, 41-42, 92n, 403-404, 413, 415, 445; xvii, 8, 169; xviii, 33, 36, 114.

1b) Favorable references to "ease" or criticisms of "intensity": iv, 53; v, 88; vi, 163; viii, 78, 80, 87, 283, 316; ix, 237-241; x, 44, 61, 67; xi, 60, 69, 131-132, 134, 248, 248n; xii, 92, 329; xvi, 12, 49, 153, 188, 318, 353; xviii, 81, 113, 278; xx, 153, 243.

2a) Favorable references to narrow scope, or criticisms of broad range of concern: i, 125; iv, 132; v, 71, 151, 181, 376, 379; vii, 117; viii, 79, 103; ix, 175, 180, 196, 218, 220, 243; x, 303; xi, 30, 97, 131-132, 147, 229, 278, 317; xii, 197-199, 312; xvi, 188, 402, 404, 408; xvii, 8, 33, 167-168, 332f.; xviii, 41n, 304; xix, 84, 209-210; xx, 92, 135.

2b) Favorable references to broad scope, or criticisms of narrowness: i, 124; iv, 47-51, 64, 123, 151, 200, 238; v, 52, 54-55; vi, 65-66, 150, 327, 328; vii, 142, 314; viii, 29, 33, 52, 59-69, 266n, 271; ix, 170, 195, 204; x, 130, 303; xi, 8, 16, 47, 116, 130-131, 190, 275; xii, 26, 101, 123, 164, 248; xvi, 53, 59, 243, 371, 401; xvii, 25, 26, 92, 175, 189f., 326, 328; xviii, 81, 113, 417; xix, 15, 288; xx, 157, 262, 270, 321.

3a) Favorable references to structured, filtered, or selfish perception, or criticisms of unmodified or selfless perception: iv, 120, 152; v, 3; viii, 57-58, 176, 202; ix, 244; x, 52; xi, 81, 154, 278; xvi, 41-43, 53, 101-102, 397-398, 402, 404; xvii, 8, 29, 33, 65, 332; xix, 10, 210; xx, 97, 102, 237.

3b) Favorable references to selfless perception, or criticisms of structured/filtered awareness: i, 3, 7; iv, 5, 74; vi, 92-93, 151; vii, 144, 228, 310; viii, 52, 76, 77, 169, 224, 266n, 269, 270; ix, 165, 195; x, 18, 89; xi, 48, 54, 115, 135; xii, 32, 101, 352; xvi, 6, 89, 132-133, 339, 364; xvii, 103, 189f., 326; xviii, 36, 148; xix, 93, 95-96; xx, 126, 157, 230, 316f.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSES OF INDIVIDUAL ESSAYS

" . . . for I seldom see my way
a page or even a sentence beforehand."
(1821: viii, 6)

A trying problem that many Hazlitt scholars have faced is that of finding any kind of pattern in the writings of a man who often wrote quickly and with little revision--indeed, Hazlitt himself said in his Table-Talk collection:

What abortions are these Essays! What errors, what ill-paced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! . . . I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions, and polish my periods: but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do.

(viii, 79)

M. H. Abrams has said that Hazlitt's rapidity of composition was possible "only because his essays are relatively planless";¹ elsewhere he contrasts Lamb's "delicately contrived rhetoric and meticulously controlled organization" to Hazlitt's "hard-hitting plain style and seemingly casual order of topics."² Ian Jack writes that "Interested as he is in

¹"William Hazlitt," in Vol. II of The Norton Anthology of English Literature (2 vols.; New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1962), p. 512.

²Ibid., p. 19.

the essay as a form, he is more interested in the truth which he is pursuing," and "At times he piles up statements with an apparent lack of any evolution in the thought."³ One of the best treatments of the structure of Hazlitt's writing has been contributed by W.P. Albrecht; but his exemplary analysis of "On the Fear of Death" is only three pages long.⁴

To anyone acquainted with Hazlitt's varied essays it is obvious that there is no simple solution to the structural questions involved. In general it may be said that he frequently utilized the tensions of contrasts of ideas and of shifting points of view; he was also, as Herschel Baker puts it, "a master of association"⁵ in giving his mind free reign to wander about--and often away from--his topics, or in letting his moods grow in layers of accretion about a central nugget of experience. The problems of structure in Hazlitt's work are quite diverse, and, extreme individual that the man was, his mind would never lend itself to such rhetorical conventions as those of Dr.

³"Hazlitt," in English Literature: 1815-1832, Vol. X of The Oxford History of English Literature, ed. by F.P. Wilson and Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 273, 277.

⁴Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination, pp. 163-169.

⁵William Hazlitt, p. 393.

Johnson; indeed, Hazlitt would probably bridle at any hint of predictability in his spontaneous responses to the varied world he lived in.⁶

However, I think that some further progress can be made in our knowledge of Hazlitt's structures--though it will never, of course, be a complete solution--if more attention is given to the particular oppositions already delineated. So steeped in them was his way of thinking that Hazlitt sometimes hung large sections of essays--and occasionally entire compositions--on the interplay or balance of the same few elements we have been concerned to trace. Particular analysis of several essays will make the point more clear.

I

"On Going a Journey" (1822: viii, 181-189)¹ is divided into five paragraphs. For most of the essay the au-

⁶See, for example, viii, 285: "Now I hate my style to be known; as I hate all idiosyncrasy."

¹This essay was a favorite of Robert Louis Stevenson, who quotes from it repeatedly in his own "Walking Tours." At one point he refers to it with the accolade, "On Going a Journey, which is so good that there should be a tax levied on all who have not read it." Later in the same essay he quotes part of the passage in which Hazlitt recollects his twentieth birthday; Stevenson then adds: "I should wish to quote more, for though we are mighty fine fellows nowadays, we cannot write like Hazlitt" (Works [26 vols., Author's edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895-1901], XIII, 153, 157).

thor treats of how a journey allows him to see the world with great serenity and with no constrictions or hindrances--essentially as Shakespeare would see it. But as the essay moves on, Hazlitt also begins to assert the value of a focused and concentrated perspective, in which one's own habitual patterns of thought are to be valued rather than discarded. The piece ends in a balance of the opposites, with both of the polar ways of approaching life being accepted as necessary and desirable.

The first paragraph is quite brief. "One of the pleasantest things in the world," the essayist begins, "is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me." There is a contrast immediately established here between "society," linked with the confining structure of a room, and "nature," linked with the boundless expanse of the out-of-doors. Already, then, we have a strong suggestion that Hazlitt's mind is working with its characteristic polar concerns of confinement and focus of awareness vs. a universal susceptibility; and we might suspect, therefore, that the other elements of the opposition are also involved (the next paragraph will show clearly that they are). The essayist continues with a remark taken from

Cicero's De Officiis: "I am then never less alone than when alone."² Obviously this is an apparent contradiction; it may be more intelligible, though, if we realize that in using this particularly appropriate quotation Hazlitt is shifting from one polar viewpoint to the other within the one sentence, even as he did in his remark that Wordsworth's "strength lies in his weakness." The word "alone," always carrying the notion of separation from something, is used from two different points of reference. From one angle, Hazlitt is standing within a structured pattern (society)--"alone" in this case signifies separation from this habitual order of men. But when he is "alone" in this sense, he is "never less alone" in the other. This other sense derives from a stance within nature, for in this context he is not separated from anything--he experiences what we shall call Shakespearean or Paradisal vision, in which there are no hindrances which distance him from the objects of his perception; he has complete "negative capability" and is one with everything he sees. Thus Hazlitt may indeed be alone

²Cf. De Officiis, III, i, 1, trans. by Walter Miller in The Loeb Classical Library, ed. by T.E. Page et al. (London: William Heinemann Ltd; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), pp. 270, 271; and De Re Publica, I, xvii, 27, trans. by Clinton W. Keyes in The Loeb Classical Library, ed. by T.E. Page et al. (London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 48, 49.

and not alone at once, separated and not separated, if we understand that two different angles of vision lie behind the surface of his statement.

The second paragraph is quite lengthy; it has the function of specifying and expanding the contrast of perspectives suggested in paragraph one. In addition, it continues the emphasis on Shakespearean vision as being superior to structured or confined ways of seeing things. The paragraph repeatedly states the essayist's desire for a feeling of serenity, his craving for a large expanse to move about in (physically and intellectually), and his wish to see things freshly, without any habitual associations. For example, expressing his desire for serenity, he wishes "to muse on indifferent matters"--"indifferent" being an important word for him, as we have previously seen. He "sings for joy"; and "mine," he says, "is that undisturbed silence which alone is perfect eloquence." Quoting Shakespeare, he writes, "'Leave, oh leave me to my repose!'" and he gives a passage from Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess describing Phoebe and Endymion:

. . . she convey'd him softly in a sleep
His temples bound with poppy

He says, further, of his own state: "I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze."

Such concerns for emotional tranquility are endlessly repeated in the paragraph, sometimes shading so finely into his other two desires that this one notion of serenity is difficult to separate.

A similar situation holds true with his wish for a broad, rather than confined, expanse in which to operate--the notion is always there, though usually mixed in and dovetailing with the other two elements which, for purposes of analysis, we are distinguishing. He says, for example: "I like more elbow-room, and fewer incumbrances"; and shortly afterwards: "It is because I want a little breathing space to muse on indifferent matters . . . that I absent myself from the town for a while." And he wishes to walk and move about down a "winding" road, i.e., one which allows for lateral motion. He also says, "I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the analytical"; the former term suggests a desire to take in a variety of objects in his perception, the latter to focus on some one thing in particular. The contrast of "broadness" vs. "narrowness" is certainly present.

Several times he expresses the further desire to be free of all structures that usually exist within his perception--verbal and societal structures especially. If Haz-

litt is to put a feeling into words or try to describe a subtle sensation, he must inevitably formalize this thought, due to the very nature of language. Language does not exist without structure and order; these "incumbrances" must inevitably accompany verbal expression. And it is just such pre-set patterns that Hazlitt wishes to avoid when he is in the country: "No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them." Such structures of thought are anathema to a Shakespearean type of vision. Indeed, in his essay "On Shakespeare and Milton" he specifically praises the dramatist for his lack of such structures: "Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature" (v, 50). Hazlitt may therefore ask, "Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment?" And he repeats the same idea in saying that "this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment."

We have already seen that writers such as Shakespeare and Scott actually free their readers' minds from old ways; it is therefore appropriate that Hazlitt can have such vision "when I escape from the throng to do so." The notion of "the throng," society, or people in one's everyday world, is impor-

tant in paragraph two because social relations also demand a structure (as does language). Hazlitt gives examples; speaking of walking in the country in company with others he says:

I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party.

"Manners" is the key word--when in a social situation, one must abide by such set patterns of action. But there are other difficulties, too: "If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it." In short, different people perceive things in different ways, and if there is a discrepancy, one has to resort to a verbal, analytical tack to account for it--but to do so distorts one's own feelings. It is not surprising, then, that Hazlitt, earlier, says: "'Out upon such half-faced fellowship,' say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others." It is important, and characteristic, that these two opposites of structured and non-structured activity are not unified--Hazlitt must have one or the other separately. He can balance, but not synthesize them.

In general, paragraph two is repetitious of the same ideas rather than internally progressive. But there are a few more individual points worth commenting upon. One such is the following image: "From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore." The opening phrase suggests that Hazlitt has indeed "gone out of himself"--that he is not confined spatially by the limits of his earth-bound body or by physical reality. The second division, about plunging into his "past" being, suggests a quotation which the essayist uses elsewhere to describe both Shakespeare and Coleridge: they each have "a mind reflecting ages past" (v, 47; xi, 29). The significance of the remark may lie in a suggestion that the past is more innocent, being a time before one's present habits of perception were developed. The reference to an Indian may suggest the "noble savage," one who still remains in a Paradisal state. And "plunges headlong into the wave" suggests the total immersion in experience that Paradisal vision allows for--nothing is screened, channelled, or filtered out of one's sensation when one perceives in this way.

The quotation from Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess at the end of the paragraph is appropriate because of the mood

of serenity it creates, as we have already indicated. But there is another striking aspect to the passage:

Here be all new delights, cool streams, and wells,
 Arbours o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells;
 Choose where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,
 Or gather rushes to make many a ring
 For thy long fingers;

The fact that the speaker tells his auditor to "Choose where thou wilt" to sit would probably have appealed to Hazlitt, as it points out the lack of any restrictions or "manners" in this natural setting.

A further point about paragraph two is the inconsistency of person throughout it--Hazlitt seems to arbitrarily use "I," "we," "you," and "one" in expressing agency in his sentences. This may well be an unconscious dramatization of the difficulty he had in capturing verbally the type of experience he wants to relate--something which he repeatedly admits is difficult for him to do, whereas he specifically points out that for someone like Coleridge it is easy. There is a mixture of the personal with universal elements in his choice of words--as if Hazlitt could not quite capture the universality he experienced in all its purity, or as if he felt the need to speak personally in order to communicate to others what was really a non-personal and universal sensation. If we take the inconsistencies collectively, we get the impression that the necessary but limiting forms of language

are preventing him from perfectly communicating his feelings. His own writing, then, unconsciously dramatizes his assertions.

The third paragraph, also quite lengthy, continues the contrast of opposite viewpoints, with the same stress as to which is the more valuable. The opening, though, pays something of a compliment to Charles Lamb and his kind of perspective, which (here) is opposite to the Shakespearean type. Lamb is the "best" company indoors, i.e., within the structure of society; but he is therefore bad when one wishes to quit such confinements. Nevertheless, Hazlitt seems to suggest (though the passage is ambiguous) that someone like Lamb may still have value out of doors, as conversing with him in the open air will set a "keener edge on appetite." This is definitely a statement made from the stance of Hazlitt's Wordsworthian set of values, indicating as it does the positive value of focusing on and intensifying one particular avenue of response. And "this sort of friendly altercation," here, is a good thing, whereas "this continual comparing of notes" from the previous paragraph was an activity to be shunned. It is interesting to see, however, that Hazlitt switches back to the opposite, non-Wordsworthian view very quickly, and characteristically he contradicts himself in the process. The relevant passage is as follows:

The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavor of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at the approach of night-fall, or to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to 'take one's ease at one's inn!' These eventful moments in our lives are in fact too precious, too full of solid, heart-felt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself and drain them to the last drop: They will do to talk of or to write about afterwards.

Apparently conversation with a friend (at the start of the passage) is a contributing factor in heightening one's appetite and is therefore valuable. There is, however, an ambiguity--is the "friend" or the "open air" responsible for setting the "keener edge" on appetite? If the "open air" alone is responsible for the increased expectation, why would conversation be mentioned in connection with it at all? Evidently the human element is necessary here. But at the end of this passage, Hazlitt renounces any social relationship and any use of language in going to an inn--such things should come "afterwards," lest they distort the pure feelings of the moment. Despite the ambiguity which is there, we are left with the sense that the essayist has two opposite views on the value of having conversation with a friend as he approaches dinner in some roadside town.

If there is to be any talk at all, Hazlitt would prefer it to be with a stranger--for a friend calls up the associations and responses that must be used in the world of the town; and these are the very things, the very "manners" one wishes to escape from. "A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is part of the furniture and costume of an inn," he says; and a few sentences later he adds: "But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of a scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character"--as would a filter.

He continues: "Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits You are no longer a citizen of the world: but your 'unhoused free condition is put into circumscription and confine.'" From this viewpoint it is obviously bad if such hints of profession turn up in conversation. This, incidentally, is a direct contradiction to what the essayist says in his essay "On Pedantry": "It is a very bad sign (unless where it arises from singular modesty) when you cannot tell a man's profession from his conversation. Such persons either feel no interest in what concerns them most, or do not express what they feel" (iv, 81n). As in the other cases mentioned, the existence of

such a contradiction clearly indicates that Hazlitt's mind is working with his opposite values.

Paragraph three continues to repeat ideas we have encountered before. One of the characteristics of Shakespearean vision is the complete lack of "egotism" and personal identity separate from the objects of vision; the essayist now returns to this theme:

Oh! It is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion--to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties One may take one's choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one's real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful.

To lose his own identity and to become whatever character he chooses is the capability Hazlitt desires--the "negative capability," as Keats called it. What the essayist wants here is precisely what he values so highly in Shakespeare in "On Posthumous Fame": "He seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own, but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass successively through 'every mode of untried being'" (iv, 23). Again, we might point out that Hazlitt's valuing of negative capability here contradicts his stance in another essay, entitled (ironically!) "On Consistency of Opinion," in which he says: "It is well not to go out of ourselves, and to be contented to take up with what we are, for better for

worse" (xvii, 33).

He moves on to talk about inns; his essential comment is that "an inn restores us to the level of nature, and quits scores with society!" Thus, even though an inn is a place of social assembly, it does not impose societal manners or structures upon one's perspective--rather, it frees one from just such confinements. At an inn, Paradisal or Shakespearean vision and not structured perception obtains; and this is what is essential--again, the way one sees is what Hazlitt is interested in, not what one sees. Hazlitt may therefore be observing men just like those he would see in London; but there is a radical difference--at an inn, the way he perceives them is not at all like the way he would see them in the city. There, his perception is confined and directed by custom, personal habit, and prescribed manners; here, he sees everything freshly, as if looking upon things for the first time. It is because of this newness of vision that Hazlitt says he has "spent some enviable hours at inns." For in looking at problems with this new, non-habitual approach, he has had several genuine insights that would not have arisen in London. He lists a number of examples: he "found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas"; he "compared triumphantly" Westall's drawings to the figure of a girl who ferried him across the Severn. And when he turns his attention to books

"in this way" (i.e., with serenity, universal awareness, and freshness of vision) the experience is exhilarating--he even sits up half the night at an inn in Bridgewater reading sentimental novels. The particular subjects of his insights aren't really important--what he remembers is the joy he felt from his way of looking at them. But the most memorable of all his experiences of Paradisal or Shakespearean vision is that which he had while walking to the Welsh inn at Llangollen on his twentieth birthday.

Hazlitt relates this incident very carefully, choosing several details which emphasize the freshness of the vision he experienced. First, the letter he reads from the New Eloise is "St. Preux's description of his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud"; i.e., his reading matter is of someone who saw a striking natural scene for the very first time--with fresh vision, untainted by habit. Second, it is Hazlitt's own birthday, probably suggestive to him of a new beginning, free from the trammels of the past. Third, he says: "I had for the first time come from a place in the neighborhood to visit this delightful spot [the Vale of Llangollen]"; he himself is seeing a natural scene with no preconceived expectations, even as St. Preux did. Fourth, he says: "The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point,

you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre . . .";³ he thus emphasizes the surprise of the incident, the unexpected nature of what happened--he therefore could not have had any set expectations. Fifth, he quotes lines from Coleridge's "Ode to the Departing Year"⁴ to describe what he sees; and Coleridge, of course, is remarkable for his own freshness of perception. Sixth, Hazlitt himself relates that "a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream"; he thereby emphasizes the youth and newness of nature in the Spring, in harmony with his own mental state. And finally, he describes that mental state as one of great "Hope"--and it is this quality, along

³Having visited this delightful spot myself, I can personally attest to the accuracy of Hazlitt's description. The road which turns off between Chirk and Wrexham is now labelled the A5; the "certain point" is precisely at the western boundary of the village of Froncysyllte (near a house called "Argoed cottage"), where, due to a bend in the road, one does indeed come "all at once" upon the beautiful prospect of Langollen Vale stretching in the distance.

⁴Note the association with Eden in the context of the lines quoted from the Ode:

O Albion! O my mother Isle!
 Thy valleys fair as Eden's bowers,
 Glitter green with sunny showers;
 Thy grassy uplands' gentle swells
 Echo to the beat of flocks;

(The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. by E.H. Coleridge [2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912], I, 166.)

with freshness, that Hazlitt says characterized the vision of Adam and Eve in Paradise:

In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothes with fresh beauty in their sight.

(v, 67)

The great emotional power of the Llangollen vision thus derives primarily from the way in which Hazlitt perceived nature, from the qualities of his own type of vision.

But immediately after the relation of this incident, his thoughts start to take a new turn, toward the idea that "The beautiful is vanished, and returns not." The great experience he had is now lost--the traces of it are now "broken and defaced" and "a precipice of years separates me from what I then was. . . . Not only I myself have changed--the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible." He says he will try to return "in thought" to his Paradisal vision (indeed, the Dee is called "the river of Paradise" here), but he is still faced with the fact that he has lost the type of sight which would allow him back into Paradise.

Paragraph four is a digression, but a necessary one, for in it Hazlitt attempts to find the reasons for his loss of such vision. The fact that the paragraph is digressive is indicated immediately by the radical change in the texture of

the language--the end of paragraph three is personal, poetic, and laced with images; paragraph four is suddenly abstract, assertive, and analytical. The essence of his argument here is that men naturally tend to have limited vision and to relate everything they see to their own narrow selves, and that therefore such comedowns are, in general, inevitable. Traveling, he says, demonstrates this fact; in giving us new perspectives it makes us realize how narrow our normal vision is. "We cannot enlarge our conceptions," he says, "we only shift our point of view." And "the map that we do not see before us is a blank. . . . the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance." This same idea, that men naturally tend to have a narrow scope of awareness, is characteristically rephrased several times within this one paragraph. So, too, travel shows us that not only do we naturally have a narrow perspective, but that it is also a self-centered one. "In travelling through a wild barren country," Hazlitt writes, "I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it." And shortly afterwards he says: "We measure the universe by ourselves"--we naturally tend to fit everything to the procrustean structures of our own minds.

This thought, that in everyday life our vision is the

opposite of Paradisal, is not new to Hazlitt; it is quite characteristic of his other writings. In "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth" he makes a similar statement, although more bitter in tone, of the same idea: "The mind soars by an effort to the grand and lofty: it is at home in the grovelling, the disagreeable, and the little" (xvii, 199). And in "On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life" he suggests that such vision is not only normal but, indeed, necessary in the everyday world:

In common life, the narrowness of our ideas and appetites is more favorable to the accomplishment of our designs, by confining our attention and ambition to one simple object, than a greater enlargement of comprehension or susceptibility of taste.

(xii, 197)

And in the same essay he also says:

To do any one thing best, there should be an exclusiveness, a concentration, a bigotry, a blindness of attachment to that one object; so that the widest range of knowledge and most diffusive subtlety of intellect will not uniformly produce the most beneficial results.

The first part of this statement sounds very much like a comment he would make of Wordsworth.

It is important to note that Hazlitt's comments on our everyday social practices are essentially like his comments on Wordsworth, Byron, Godwin, and the others of their sort. In "On Poetry in General" the essayist himself attests to the general similarity of the types of perception involved.

First of all, we must understand that in this essay he is talking about Wordsworthian rather than Shakespearean poetry--e.g., he states that "Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As in describing natural objects, it impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy . . ." (v, 4-5) and so on. And he makes comparisons of this type of poetry with everyday life: "If poetry is a dream," he says, "the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are, because we wish them so, then there is no other or better reality" (v, 3). And in the next paragraph he says explicitly: "We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for these creations of the mind 'which ecstasy is very cunning in.'" "Everyday" vision is thus similar to Wordsworthian sight in that both involve the imposition of our own shapes or structures upon the subjects of perception; and, as we have seen, both involve narrowness rather than broadness in the scope of sensibility. Hazlitt does not really speak of intensity of feeling in connection with "everyday" vision; on the other hand, though, even from the contrast set up in "On Going a Journey" it is obvious that such a way of seeing things lacks the serenity of Shake-

spearean vision. The second quotation from Hazlitt, above, may give us the necessary insight we need here: "but poetry is the most emphatical" Evidently the major difference between "everyday" vision and Wordsworthian sight is a matter of degree--the former is just less intense than the latter. It is not an important difference that Wordsworth generates his own structures to impose upon objects, and that a more conventional person simply accepts the predetermined structures of society and imposes them on what he sees. The conventional man of society, in accepting prevailing "manners," thereby makes such structures his own; thus he does impress his own forms upon what he sees. What he does is therefore essentially like Wordsworth's practice, in that the resulting perception is indeed filtered or modified. "Everyday" vision is thus essentially like Wordsworthian perception, being also essentially opposed, then, to Shakespearean vision.

At the very end of the digression of paragraph four, Hazlitt says he will now return "to the question I have quit-
ted above," i.e., in paragraph three. At the end of this third paragraph, he had just come to the realization that he now lacks Paradisal vision and that what is left to him is the mere perspective of limitation. In paragraph five he returns to this topic, that at present his perceptions are narrowed, by verbal and societal structures.

But in treating this topic he now takes a new tack, one which illustrates his characteristic inconsistency in assigning preference to one set of values over the other. For where he saw limited vision as a negative thing at the end of paragraph three, he now sees the same limitation as a source of positive strength. Travelling "in company with a friend or party" now heightens his appreciation of "ruins, aqueducts, and pictures," just as a companion before had set a "keener edge" on appetite. He now gives several examples of instances in which limited or focused vision has produced great pleasure for him. He mentions discussing Stonehenge, and also "descanting" to a party on the sights at Oxford. In both cases, the acts of verbalization and interaction with other people are processes that are joyful rather than annoying, which he previously thought them to be. So, too, he says that when he travels among foreign lands he feels pleased to have companions of his own--in essence he is saying that the societal structure which is one's own culture can be thought of as a refuge and a source of safety; from this viewpoint it is much more than a confining and inhibiting cage. "In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas," he says, "one seems a species by one's-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support."

But at this point he again swings back to a memory of Paradisal vision--in this essay, when one side of his dialectic becomes too prominent, the other seems to be automatically called in to balance things off. He therefore remembers Calais at the time of the French Revolution, where he "breathed the air of general humanity." Cultural differences were non-existent, as at this time all such structures had vanished from men's vision; the sensation was truly that of Paradise. But now he says, "the whole is vanished like a shade," even as his experience at Llangollen is now gone. And the recognition that it is gone leads him into another consideration of why such vision is transient--the movement of his mind here is much the same as what we have just seen in his digression to account for the loss of the Llangollen experience. And, indeed, he goes into something of a digression here, too, for the dash that marks the start of his explanation of this loss also signals a sharp break from the depressing direction in which his thoughts were turning.

Notice just how sharp this break is:

The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled: nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people!--There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else: but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. . . .

As he did before, after the descent from the Llangollen vision,

he changes to the opposite perspective. Now he says of his Paradisal vision that it "does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but momentary hallucination"--and "hallucination" is a rather unfavorable word.

But the movement of the remaining sentences is essentially to avoid going to an extreme in valuing one mode of vision over the other--the scales of his mind seem to oscillate less violently up and down; he is moving to strike a balance between the two elements of his dialectic. Thus, he 'corrects' the uncomplimentary overstatement of Paradisal sight being an "hallucination" by saying that we are "perhaps more enviable" individuals when we see in this way. But he also stresses that such vision does not really relate to our everyday world. This is essentially the same point he made above, that in our normal lives we do best with limited sight. Therefore while it is sometimes good to be "lost to ourselves" or to "go out" of ourselves and our usual confinements--i.e., to have the negative capability of Shakespearean vision--it is sometimes also good to stay in ourselves and our structures. At the end of the essay Hazlitt finally strikes a balance between the two modes of vision that have been alternately going up and down in his estimation: on the one hand, it is good to get away from "ties and objects that recall them," to be able to see without any such constrictions. On the other hand,

"we can only be said to fulfill our destiny in the place that gave us birth"--i.e., in the context of the confinements or structures of one's own country and everyday society. The final sentence of the essay is most important: "I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could any where borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!" Note that Hazlitt does not choose one alternative over the other, for both have value to him.

"On Going a Journey" is thus, finally, a dramatization of Hazlitt's famous belief that "truth is not one," for the movement of the essay concludes with his realization that a mixture of opposite perspectives is the key to happiness.

II

Herschel Baker has said that "Mr. Kemble's Retirement" (1817: v, 374-379) is "one of the peaks of English drama criticism."¹ John Philip Kemble was, with Edmund Kean, one of Hazlitt's favorite actors, the essayist having followed his career for nearly twenty years; and upon Kemble's finally leaving the stage in 1817, Hazlitt contributed to The Times this assessment of his life's work. Baker says that it is "an accolade that would gladden any actor's heart";

¹William Hazlitt, p. 290n.

however, he is somewhat puzzled by the essay, for he also writes that, apart from the "sentimental ties" involved, "Hazlitt's attitude toward Kemble is hard to understand, for he was a stiff and formal actor."² But it is precisely Kemble's formality which makes the essayist's attitude easy to understand, for in Kemble Hazlitt found an excellent exemplar of one of the sets of values he prized throughout his life, that of intensity of feeling and narrowed scope of concern joined to formality of method.³ And most of the essay is structured by his consideration of this one set of values from alternating positive and negative viewpoints.

The first paragraph establishes the basic reason for his admiration of Kemble; in it, the essayist gradually expands his consideration of the actor until it swells into a statement of what was for Hazlitt a vital truth:

Mr. Kemble took his leave of the stage on Monday night, in the character of Coriolanus. . . . There is something in these partings with old public favourites exceedingly affecting. . . . Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers, are

²Ibid., pp. 290, 289.

³Joseph Donohue, Jr., in his authoritative study Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), assesses Kemble's style as "'neoclassic,' . . . formal in attitude and measured in cadence. . . . Perhaps no style has ever been so deliberate, so calculated, as his" (p. 245).

among our earliest recollections--among our last regrets. . . . The impression [of Kemble nearly twenty years ago] appears as distinct as if it were of yesterday. In fact, intellectual objects, in proportion as they are lasting, may be said to shorten life. Time has no effect upon them. The petty and the personal, that which appeals to our sense and our interests, is by degrees forgotten, and fades away into the distant obscurity of the past. The grand and the ideal, that which appeals to the imagination, can only perish with it, and remains with us, unimpaired in its lofty abstraction, from youth to age; as, wherever we go, we still see the same heavenly bodies shining over our heads!

That which appeals to the imagination is what endures in life, and Hazlitt admired Kemble precisely because he appealed to the imagination. Seeing him retire in the role of Coriolanus was particularly moving because of the continuity it showed:

Coriolanus, the character in which he took his leave of the stage, was one of the first in which we remember to have seen him; and it was one in which we were not sorry to part with him, for we wished to see him appear like himself to the last.

Hazlitt did indeed have a "wish" as he went to the theatre on that June night--and the importance of the wish is underscored by his repetition of it: "Why then do we approve of his retiring? Because we do not wish him to wait till it is necessary for him to retire." Hazlitt's hope that Kemble's final performance would be as good as his first reflects more than just "sentimental ties" to the past--it shows his desire to believe that things of the imagination do in fact endure through time. The validity of one of his most cherished be-

liefs was thus at stake. When he could finally write, then, that "On the last evening, he displayed the same excellence and gave the same prominence to the very same passages, that he used to do," Hazlitt had experienced the fulfillment of his hope: Kemble's last performance proved the ultimate value of imagination. The feeling which thus permeates the paragraph is one of satisfaction with the actor's performance mingled with self-satisfaction at the confirmation of a cherished personal theory.

The first paragraph concludes with the citation of particular incidents from the play--in the second example, on the scene of reconciliation between Coriolanus and his mother, the essayist notes that Kemble was a disappointment. But he adds that "Perhaps this was not the fault of Mr. Kemble, but of the stage itself." The brief second paragraph continues in the same line, noting the difficulty of any actor in trying to capture a Shakespearean character's depth of sentiment.⁴ The argument on Kemble's appropriateness for

⁴This is perhaps an echo of a comment from 1815: "the reader of the plays of Shakespear is almost always disappointed in seeing them acted; and, for our part, we should never go to see them acted, if we could help it" (v, 222). Charles Lamb held similar views that no production could match the ideal performance provided by imagination (cf. "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation" in The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, ed. by E.V. Lucas [7 vols.; London: Methuen & Co., 1903-1905], I, 97-111). Coleridge, too, said he was always

a particular part, however, needs a more solid basis if it is to be developed. In paragraphs three and four, then, Hazlitt backtracks to consider the actor's general qualities as shown by his entire career, which qualities make him fit or unfit for certain roles. He also concomitantly develops the theme from paragraph one, that the actor's performances are indeed things of the imagination. And after the transitional third paragraph, in the fourth he specifies which of the opposite types of imagination he means. From this point on, the structure of the essay is governed by Hazlitt's shifts of viewpoint around a central concern, that of Kemble's general qualities as an actor and how they are advantageous or limiting to him.

Paragraph four begins with a classification of the actor according to customary standards of value:

It has always appeared to us, that the range of characters in which Mr. Kemble more particularly shone, and was superior to every other actor, were those which con-

disappointed by actual productions of Shakespeare's plays (cf. Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, ed. by T.M. Raysor [2 vols., Everyman's Library; London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1960], II, 230, 57, 68). Note, however, Donohue's distinction (ibid., p. 285):

"The fact that Lamb, Coleridge, and Hazlitt approach the drama with this ideal in mind is an important indication of the homogeneity of their critical writings. Their essential difference is simply that Lamb and Coleridge are descriptive critics concerned with the ideal performance, while Hazlitt is a judicial critic concerned with assessing the failure of most actors and most productions to measure up to this same ideal."

sisted in the development of some one solitary sentiment or exclusive passion. From a want of rapidity of style, of scope, and variety, he was often deficient in expressing the bustle and complication of different interest; . . . but in giving the habitual workings of a predominant feeling, as in Penruddock, or The Stranger, in Coriolanus, Cato, and some others, where all the passions move round a central point, and are governed by one master-key, he stood unrivalled.

Hazlitt's use of characteristic diction and phraseology--"solitary," "exclusive," "want of . . . scope, and variety," "habitual workings" (rather than "spontaneous impulses")--clearly indicate that his mind is working within one of its usual frameworks of reference; and his attitude, in this paragraph, is that these Wordsworthian qualities of narrowness and personal structuring are a definite advantage to Kemble in many parts. And, as we might expect, Hazlitt also sees intensity of passion connected with the actor's "exclusive" and "habitual" mental activity; citing Kemble's performance of Coriolanus as a whole, for example, he says:

So in Coriolanus, he exhibited the ruling passion with the same unbroken firmness, he preserved the same haughty dignity of demeanour, the same energy of will, and unbending sternness of temper throughout. He was swayed by a single impulse. His tenaciousness of purpose was only irritated by opposition; he turned neither to the right nor the left; the vehemence with which he moved forward increasing every instant, till it hurried him on to the catastrophe.

A similar intensity is then described in Kemble's portrayal of Leontes. Hazlitt's conclusion, in paragraph five, is typical:

In such characters, Mr. Kemble had no occasion to call to his aid either the resources of invention, or the tricks of art: his success depended on the increasing intensity with which he dwelt on a given feeling, or enforced a passion that resisted all interference or control.

Having listed some of the roles for which Kemble's qualities were suited, he then shifts his viewpoint in paragraphs six, seven, and part of eight to consider roles for which the actor's same approach was unsuitable. Foremost of these roles was that of Hamlet:

In Hamlet, on the contrary, Mr. Kemble in our judgment unavoidably failed from a want of flexibility, of that quick sensibility which yields to every motive, and is borne away with every breath of fancy, which is distracted in the multiplicity of its reflections, and lost in the uncertainty of its resolutions.

No wonder that Hazlitt thought Kemble failed "unavoidably"-- Hamlet has exactly the opposite generic type of mind. Indeed, as he is described here the melancholy Dane appears to be another Coleridge!⁵ The mismatch of Kemble and Hamlet is thus

⁵ See the essay "Mr. Coleridge" in The Spirit of the Age:

"[Coleridge] could not realize all he knew or thought, and less could not fix his desultory ambition. . . . While he should be occupied with a given pursuit, he is thinking of a thousand other things; a thousand tastes, a thousand objects tempt him, and distract his mind, which keeps open house, and entertains all comers. . . . Mr. Coleridge's bark, 'taught with the little nautilus to sail,' the sport of every breath, dancing to every wave, 'Youth at its prow, and Pleasure at its helm,' flutters its gaudy pennons in the air, glitters in the sun, but we wait in vain to hear of its arrival in the destined harbour."

(xi, 34, 36-37)

complete; and this particular description of the situation (Kemble playing the role "in one undeviating straight line, which is . . . remote from the natural grace and indolent susceptibility of the character") mirrors Hazlitt's comment from Characters of Shakespear's Plays, that "Mr. Kemble unavoidably fails in this character from a want of ease and variety" (iv, 237).

The actor's style was also unsuitable for King John and Macbeth, as the next paragraphs make clear. In the former role, Hazlitt says, Kemble "seemed waiting for some complicated machinery to enable him to make his next movement, instead of trusting to the true impulses of passion." The use of mechanical imagery is continued in another comment, comparing the actor to an automaton: "If an image could be constructed by magic art to play King John, it would play it in much the same manner that Mr. Kemble played it." The contrast is of course that between artful or contrived formality and unstructured, unprepared-for spontaneity. The two opposite types of imagination underlie Hazlitt's point

Interestingly enough, Coleridge too saw Hamlet as an image of himself. A.C. Bradley has noted the point, saying that "he dwarfs the sublime struggle of Hamlet into the image of his own unhappy weakness" (Poetry for Poetry's Sake [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901], p. 14). See Coleridge's statements in The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. by H.N. Coleridge (4 vols.; London: William Pickering, 1836-1839), II, 205-207. See also Inquiring Spirit, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1951), p. 170.

here--Kemble imposes the filter of "manners" on his performance; he is not open to direct contact with the natural spirit of the character. The same quality of style taints his Macbeth: He "maintained his ground too steadily . . . instead of staggering and reeling under the appalling visions of the preternatural world, and having his frame wrenched from all the holds and resting places of his will." His attachment to "holds and resting places" prevents him from being open to the truth of the situation; his Macbeth's response is therefore governed by habit rather than by direct contact with the strange world around him.

Not all of Kemble's Macbeth is criticized, though; he played some of the scenes so that they "smote upon the heart, and remained there ever after." Passion--a key element in Hazlitt's aesthetics--can thus be conveyed even by a formal or "pedantic" manner: Kemble's "monotone did not fatigue, his formality did not displease; because there was always sense and meaning in what he did."

In this same (eighth) paragraph, there is a brief contrast of Kemble and Kean: "[Kemble's] Richard III wanted that tempest and whirlwind of the soul, that life and spirit, and dazzling rapidity of motion, which fills the stage, and burns in every part of it, when Mr. Kean performs this character."

Kean was an actor of greater "variety" than Kemble;⁶ indeed, elsewhere Hazlitt says of him that "He is almost the only actor who does not spoil Shakespeare" (xviii, 256)--which is evidently a suggestion that Kean's qualities are in closer accord with Shakespeare's mind. The comparison here, then, apparently has something in it of the contrast of Hazlitt's usual opposites. But these are not developed--the rest of the essayist's commentary on the two actors is concerned mainly with their physical attributes, Kemble's "statue-like appearance" and Kean's "diminutiveness" and "want of dignity of form." By this point in the paragraph, however, Hazlitt is again viewing Kemble in a positive light, and is again listing roles that he played exceptionally well. The role of Pierre, for example, "accorded admirably with Mr. Kemble's natural manner." Cato was another part well suited to the actor, calling as it did for a studied display of artifice rather than for natural spontaneity: "It was a studied piece of classical costume--a conscious exhibition of elegantly disposed drapery, that was all: yet, as a mere display of personal and artificial

⁶This variety, though--like its opposite, "the development of some one solitary sentiment or exclusive passion"--has a negative side to it, too. Commenting on Kean's Richard III in a Morning Chronicle column of 1814, Hazlitt says that "we sometimes thought he failed, even from an exuberance of talent, and dissipated the impression of the character by the variety of his resources" (v, 181).

grace, it was inimitable."⁷

The ninth paragraph shifts back to a consideration of a role for which Kemble was not adequate. Brutus, as described by Hazlitt, is a character of great complexity and is therefore unsuited for Kemble's style of intensely developing one passion.

The essay finishes with a summary of Hazlitt's major points:

In short, we think the distinguishing excellence of his acting may be summed up in one word--intensity; in the seizing upon some one feeling or idea, in insisting upon it, in never letting it go If he had not the unexpected bursts of nature and genius, he had all the regularity of art.

In portraying characters that called for the display of these qualities, Hazlitt says, Kemble was "the most excellent actor of his time." And since these qualities were so important to the essayist throughout his life, Hazlitt thus rendered Kemble high praise indeed in seeing him as their prime exemplar on the contemporary stage.

III

"On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth," from 1827

⁷Gilbert Austin, in Chironomia; or A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery . . . (1806), p. 279, similarly compliments Kemble for attaining "the perfection and the glory of art, so finished, that every look is a commentary, every tone an illustration, every gesture a model for the statuary, and a study for the painter" (quoted by Donohue, p. 250).

(xvii, 189-199), is one of Hazlitt's more famous essays. It, too, shows extensive use of his customary concerns, most of the essay basing the feeling of immortality on the experience of selfless reliance on external objects for values, unconstricted openness to the range of all experience, and the feeling of serenity, ease, and indolence. But Hazlitt's overall concern with such qualities--and, to a lesser extent, with their opposites--does not have a structural significance here as in "On Going a Journey" or "Mr. Kemble's Retirement." "On Going a Journey" was structured by the alternate consideration of opposite desirable qualities of perception; "Immortality" makes much less use of these opposites, and its less fully-developed contrasts do not fall into structural blocks. And whereas "On Going a Journey" presented opposite sets of values, "Mr. Kemble's Retirement" consistently used one set, but structured itself by alternating positive and negative views of it. "Immortality," too, stays mainly within one set; but its alterations of viewpoint are minor and do not fall into careful balances.

There is a general movement in time through Hazlitt's reflections in the course of the essay; the early paragraphs (by far the longest) are concerned with generalized and personal memories of the feelings of youth. The third-to-last paragraph is a consideration of Hazlitt's present condition

at the time of the writing; and the next paragraph is an anticipation of the future meeting with death. However, beyond this broad movement in time, there is little form to the essay. "Immortality" does not readily lend itself to a section-by-section breakdown. It is more homogeneous than the other essays considered so far. Within the broad time framework it moves not by steps of opposition and balance, but by repetitions and accretions of similar statements around a central core of ideas. This core--Hazlitt's concern for what we have elsewhere called "Paradisal vision"--acts more as a restraining principle than as a structural device. Like a kind of subliminal tether or leash, it keeps Hazlitt's mind generally within a certain circle of ideas. It doesn't determine the order or sequence of the essayist's wanderings, but it does confine them within general limits.

To proceed with a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis would involve much repetition without showing much progress in a train of thought, for the development of this essay is in deepening our consideration of the same ideas without extending them into new conclusions. Since there is little movement (beyond the temporal drift) in the essay, a study which presents an overview rather than a sequential analysis will therefore be more appropriate.

The "feeling of Eternity in youth" is the experience

of Paradisal vision, like that of Adam and Eve in the Garden (v, 67-68). One of the characteristics of such sight is its lack of limitation, its openness to all experience. And Hazlitt expresses this idea in characteristic phraseology, saying, for example, "there is no line drawn, and we see no limit to our hopes and wishes. We make the coming age our own.--'The vast, the unbounded prospect lies before us.'" This thread is spun throughout the essay in phrases such as "we see no end" and "we set no bounds"; and there are many other expressions of "no obstacle" and "no limit." Young people experience "unrestricted opportunities," "plenitude of being," and a "variety of feelings"; indeed, in one long passage Hazlitt spells out the variety and range of possibilities that life offers to youth:

To see the golden sun and the azure sky, the outstretched ocean, to walk upon the green earth, and to be lord of a thousand creatures, to look down giddy precipices or over distant flowery vales, to see the world spread out under one's finger in a map, to bring the stars near, to view the smallest insects in a microscope, to read history, and witness the revolutions of empires and the succession of generations, to hear of the glory of Sidon and Tyre, of Babylon and Susa, as of a faded pageant, and to say all these were, and are now nothing, to think that we exist in such a point of time, and in such a corner of space, to be at once spectators and a part of the moving scene, to watch the return of the seasons, of spring and autumn, to hear

--'The stockdove plain amid the forest deep,
That drowsy rustles to the sighing gale'--
to traverse desert wildernesses, to listen to the midnight choir, to visit lighted halls, or plunge into the dungeon's

gloom, or sit in crowded theatres and see life itself mocked, to feel heat and cold, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, truth and falsehood, to study the works of art and refine the sense of beauty to agony, to worship fame and to dream of immortality, to have read Shakespear and belong to the same species as Sir Isaac Newton

The customary idea is thus specified in many different ways.

Similarly, Hazlitt repeatedly returns to the idea that the selfless imagination is a major factor in creating the feeling of immortality in youth. Such imagination, of course, involves the loss of awareness of personal identity and the reception of values from external objects and nature; a feeling of "abstraction" from self and of merging with the outside world is experienced. This idea of identification with external objects is another thread woven throughout the essay:

It is the simplicity, and as it were abstractedness of our feelings in youth, that (so to speak) identifies us with nature

. . . objects press around us, filling the mind with their magnitude and with the throng of desires that wait upon them.

We know our existence only from external objects, and we measure it by them. We can never be satisfied with gazing; and nature will still want us to look on and applaud.

. . . our step-mother Nature holds us up to see the raree-show of the universe.

We take out a new lease of existence from the objects on which we set our affections, and become abstracted, impassive, immortal in them.

Objects, on our first acquaintance with them, have that singleness and integrity of impression that it seems as

if nothing could destroy or obliterate them, so firmly are they stamped and rivetted on the brain. We repose on them with a sort of voluptuous indolence, in full faith and boundless confidence.

Hazlitt also compares the feeling of immortality to that experienced "in setting out on a delightful journey"--i.e., like the paradisal experience captured in "On Going a Journey." And at another point, he cites as an example his own experience as a young man at the time of the French Revolution ("It was the dawn of a new era"), saying, "I felt for years, and during the best part of my existence, heart-whole in that cause, and triumphed in the triumphs over the enemies of man!" The experience of selfless identification with the revolution is stressed; it is important, too, that passion sealed in Hazlitt's soul the truth of his perceived ideals.

The feeling of serenity is the third important thread in the essay, Hazlitt speaking of reposing on objects in "voluptuous indolence" and of "idling away a great deal of time in youth thinking we have enough and to spare." This thread, however, seems to be introduced almost as an afterthought, late in the essay (near the start of the third paragraph); it seems as if Hazlitt suddenly realized he had left out the third element of his usual theme and decided to correct the situation. But once found, the thread is not lost--indeed, it is a consideration of this element of Paradisal vision that forms the

conclusion of the work:

There are a few, superior, happy beings, who are born with a temper exempt from every trifling annoyance. This spirit sits serene and smiling in its native skies, and a divine harmony (whether heard or not) plays around them. This is to be at peace. Without this, it is in vain to fly into deserts, or to build a hermitage on the top of rocks, if regret and ill-humour follow us there: and with this, it is needless to make the experiment. The only true retirement is that of the heart; the only true leisure is the repose of the passions. To such persons it makes little difference whether they are young or old; and they die as they have lived, with graceful resignation.

Hazlitt's specification of this feeling with these particulars (e.g., the vanity of flying into desert, building hermitages, etc.) is unique to this essay, despite his repeated use of the same general idea in many other works. It thus exemplifies his aesthetic theory--a point we shall return to.

Throughout the consideration of Paradisal vision there is a contrapuntal thread that surfaces occasionally, showing Hazlitt's awareness of an opposite type of vision. The contrast is not structural in the essay; it is occasionally present, though, setting in relief the essayist's major points. When the vision of youth is lost, there remains only limited individual awareness; and Hazlitt's description of the state is significant for its diction:

Time and experience . . . circumscribe the limits of our expectations. It is only as the pageant of life passes by and the masques turn their backs upon us, that we see through the deception, or believe that the train will have an end.

Speaking of ends and limits and circumscriptions, along with the negatively charged word "deception," established both an opposite type of awareness and Hazlitt's attitude towards it.

The loss of the vision of youth also involves the loss of the selfless imagination: "It is not till we see the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy, withering around us, and our own pleasures cut up by the roots," Hazlitt says, "that we bring the moral home to ourselves." "To ourselves," of course, suggests the growth of self-consciousness which kills our early attitudes. And the passage of time tends also to stifle the serenity of our early years: "The ease, the jocund gaiety, the unsuspecting security of youth are fled" with the coming of experience. Hazlitt's recognition of the impossibility of always maintaining youthful vision is a characteristic of his mature work; his treatment of the theme here is particularly good, for, in considering the negative side of man's progress toward death, he does not stay solely with his frequently-repeated general ideas. The "leash" that holds him to a certain area in considering Paradisal vision itself does not hold him so tightly as he considers its loss. For example, he speaks personally--despite his use of the editorial "we"--of desiring fame to provide a feeling of immortality to replace that lost with youth. Even so, though, he finally has too

much integrity to mislead himself into accepting a counterfeit substitute as an equal to the pure feeling with which he began his own life. Indeed, he concludes the essay with the passage quoted above, showing his admiration for those who have maintained their early capacities unimpaired. The underlying wish is that he, too, might re-achieve such vision--which, indeed, he will go on to do in "The Letter-Bell," at the end of his life.

"Immortality" as a whole is an excellent example of Hazlitt's use of his own aesthetic theory, as proposed, for example, in the essay "On the Ideal" (1815: xviii, 77-84). Though this contribution to The Champion deals with pictorial art, its principles apply by analogy to Hazlitt's ideas of the writer's craft as well. In it, Hazlitt challenges the theory of Sir Joshua Reynolds that art is to present generalized forms abstracted from particulars; rather, he says, it should refine gross human perception, which sees abstractions and generalities, to see particular, concrete aspects of nature.¹ His comments on Hogarth's pictures might well apply, then, to his own writings:

They have evidently a common or general character, but that general character is defined and modified by indi-

¹See xx, 33; also v, 204: "It is the business of poetry, and indeed of all works of imagination, to exhibit the species through the individual."

vidual peculiarities, which certainly do not take away from the illusion or the effect any more than they would in nature.

The "general character" of situations is often, for Hazlitt, the involvement of certain or all of the generic qualities of perception. Such qualities permeate "Immortality" even as they do "On Going a Journey" and "Mr. Kemble's Retirement"--but Hazlitt always specifies these generalities with concrete particulars which do not repeat themselves from one essay to another.

"Immortality" thus stands as an excellent essay in itself for its timeless consideration of the hope and feelings of young people; and it also enables us to understand more clearly Hazlitt's own practice of writing in accordance with his own aesthetic theory.

IV

Hazlitt's essay on "The Letter-Bell" (xvii, 376-382)--one of the very last he wrote in his life--is one of his most famous and most moving works, giving us as it does the final views of a very perceptive man looking back on some of the most satisfying experiences of his life. His recollections are mainly of states of mind which enabled him to be happy--to feel kinship with humanity and hope for the future, and to experience satisfaction with his own personal achievements.

All of his memories are clustered around the unifying sound of the letter-bell; they are all "associations" which spring to mind as he hears it pass. And, not surprisingly, his recollections of past happiness--enabling him to look forward with hope to the future, even as he lay dying--are firmly grounded in the same sense of values that marks the work of his entire life.

After the introduction, there are essentially five recollections of mental states which, with various transitions and digressions, make up the pattern of the essay; Hazlitt's own paragraph divisions are largely irrelevant to the turns of his thought.

He begins, typically, with an arresting statement which he will expand and modify with various associations: "Complaints are frequently made of the vanity and shortness of human life, when, if we examine its smallest details, they present a world by themselves." This opening is particularly arresting as we read it today, since, knowing as we do that its author died within a few days of writing it, it signals a concern on Hazlitt's mind with the value of life as a whole--we may even wonder if Hazlitt recognized that this would be his last chance to record his feelings on this most important of subjects. He works into his treatment of it by means of an analogy:

The most trifling objects, retraced with the eye of memory, assume the vividness, the delicacy, and the importance of insects seen through a magnifying glass. There is no end of the brilliancy or the variety. The habitual feeling of the love of life may be compared to 'one entire and perfect chrysolite,' which, if analysed, breaks into a thousand shining fragments.

The wonder of life becomes all the more beautiful if its particulars are studied closely. With the "eye of memory" as his microscope, Hazlitt, then, immediately moves on to consider the letter-bell, which, like an insect, may seem insignificant to the casual perceiver, but which opens whole worlds of wonder to the mind that studies it closely enough.¹ And already Hazlitt's tack suggests his customary concerns--he is here exemplifying his oft-repeated idea that much value lies in narrowing one's focus, as one does with a magnifying glass,

¹See his comment from "Outlines of Taste," published posthumously:

"I have, in a former essay, ascertained one principle of taste or excellence in the arts of imitation, where it was shown that objects of sense are not as it were simple and self-evident propositions, but admit of endless analysis and the most subtle investigation. We do not see nature with our eyes, but with our understandings and our hearts. To suppose that we see the whole of any object, merely by looking at it, is a vulgar error: we fancy that we do, because we are, of course, conscious of no more than we see in it, but this circle of our knowledge enlarges with further acquaintance and study, and we then perceive that what we perhaps barely distinguished in the gross, or regarded as a dull blank, is full of beauty, meaning, and curious details. He sees most of nature who understands its language best, or connects one thing with the greatest number of other things."

and intently pursuing the study of any one object. Here, however, such a narrow study of the letter-bell leads him into a universe of significance. Such an alternation of opposites is less conspicuous and more fluid than the balanced oppositions of "On Going a Journey." In "The Letter-Bell" Hazlitt sees a tremendous "variety" and a great "multiplicity of items" even within one object. He has said elsewhere that "Truth is not one, but many"--in this instance, any "one" is seen to be composed of "many."

The essay moves on into a recollected state of mind based on two different experiences. The first, quite short in length, follows immediately from the introduction, with no paragraph break:

As I write this, the Letter-Bell passes It strikes upon the ear, it vibrates to the brain, it wakes me from the dream of time, it flings me back upon my first entrance into life, the period of my first coming up to town, when all around was strange, uncertain, adverse--a hubbub of confused noises, a chaos of shifting objects--. . . .

The example of his "first" entrance into life exemplifies the state of mind that always accompanies "first vision" with Hazlitt--it shows unstructured perception without the aid of habit or custom to provide ready organization of experience. All is "strange," a "hubbub," "confused," and "chaos." The feeling is that which Hazlitt mentions in pointing out the negative aspect of fresh sight in "On Going a Journey": "In such situ-

ations, so opposite to one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support" (viii, 188). Immediately, though, he describes one of the pleasant associations he connects with the letter-bell, that its sound ties him to just the "fellowship and support" that he needs:

. . . this sound alone, startling me with the recollection of a letter I had to send to the friends I had lately left, brought me as it were to myself, made me feel that I had links still connecting me with the universe, and gave the hope and patience to persevere.

Note that he says the sound "brought me as it were to myself"--thereby implying that he had been "out of himself," a characteristic of unstructured perception. The letter-bell thus affords to him, here, the comfort of structured vision that enables him to organize his new experience according to personal, habitual points of reference, and to see a frightening world simply as an extension of a structured social pattern with which he is already comfortable.

Immediately the letter-bell suggests a second recollection--this one, too, exemplifying unstructured perception, now as a positive thing rather than as a cause of fear:

At that loud-tinkling, interrupted sound (now and then), the long line of blue hills near the place where I was brought up waves in the horizon, a golden sunset hovers over them, the dwarf-oaks rustle their red leaves in the evening breeze, and the road from ---- to ----, by which I first set out on my journey through life, stares me in

the face as plain, but from time and change not less visionary and mysterious, than the pictures in the Pilgrim's Progress. I should notice, that at this time the light of the French Revolution circled my head like a glory, though dabbled with drops of crimson gore: I walked comfortable and cheerful by its side

This is another "first" journey--Hazlitt's walk with Coleridge from Wem to Shrewsbury was an experience which, like that in the Vale of Llangollen in Wales, was marked by the visionary qualities of openness to experience and complete ease (i.e., Hazlitt being "comfortable and cheerful"); indeed, it was a combination of these two experiences which inspired him to pursue a literary career.² This particular walk is also marked by the Paradisal vision of the essayist's enrapturement with the French Revolution.

Clearly, Hazlitt's remembrance of his youthful vision enables him to re-experience it even as he writes the essay--and the joy of recapturing the past is strengthened for him by the events of the present, for even as he wrote Hazlitt had lived to see the Revolution of the Three Days in July of 1830, in which the Bourbon regime--which he detested, especially after its restoration following Napoleon's fall--finally came to an end. This was the fulfillment of a dream; indeed, during a state of depression which he had recorded five years

²See "My First Acquaintance with Poets" (xvii, 106f.), and Baker's William Hazlitt, pp. 124f.

earlier in "On the Fear of Death" he wrote: "My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them to be re-edified. I should like to see some prospect of good to mankind, such as my life began with" (viii, 325). The passing of the Bourbons was just such a re-edification of his youthful hopes, a vindication of his life, and a proof to him that he had been right all along.

Not uncharacteristically, Hazlitt's pride in maintaining the integrity of his own early political ideals calls to his mind the loss of such ideals by the Lake poets. He chides Southey, hoping that the laureate will hail the age's second triumph "in appropriate verse"; and he quotes lines from Wordsworth on the "radiance" of that poet's own early perception and assails him for his loss of the "eyes of youth"--Hazlitt's characteristic expression for the combination of unfiltered perception, openness to the range of all possible experience, and serenity.³ His continues his self-righteous and indignant attack on the Lake poets--an attack which springs from the very core of his values--exulting in his own faith in liberty and in his hatred of tyranny. When he finally comes to Coleridge, however, he softens his reprimands, for Coleridge's mind,

³See also viii, 29; xii, 296; xvi, 67, 398; xviii, 401, for comments on the vision of youth--and, of course, see too "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth" (xvii, 189-199).

he says, is "still vulnerable to truth" because it is not "sordid or mechanical"--a recognition that his former friend's mind was generically different from Wordsworth's or Southey's. Hazlitt could therefore still see hope that the sage of Highgate might return to his "original liberty" of thought.

The contrast of his own mind to the political apostates' naturally gives Hazlitt an immense feeling of self-satisfaction and joy; so, too, does his third recollection of the essay, which is another suggested to him by the letter-bell: "Or if the Letter-Bell does not lead me a dance in the country, it fixes me in the thick of my town recollections, I know not how long ago." The "town recollection" he recounts dates from the period (1799 - ca. 1807) during which he lived at his brother John's house in London and tried his hand as a painter. The letter-bell, at that time, served as "a kind of alarm to break off from my work when there happened to be company to dinner or when I was going to the play." The sound was thus something that served to link him to the human community, even as it had reminded him before to send a letter to distant friends. There is more involved in the "linkage" provided by the bell than simply this, however. The present, third recollection and the fourth exemplify opposite types of happiness which alternated with each other at

the sound of the postman's approach; and the fourth recollection is anticipated when Hazlitt says the alarm cause him to "break off" from his work--a point I shall return to. The essayist now recounts experiences centering around going to the theatre--either his own attendance, which he valued all the more because, in those days, it was not a common occurrence; or the preparations of a "Miss D---" and her companion as they were about to leave for a play. The whole concern with the theatre in this memory suggests that Hazlitt is again recalling an experience of seeing with "the eyes of youth," for elsewhere (xviii, 401) he says that he always saw with such eyes whenever he went to the theatre. Even when not going himself, though, he still caught the excitement:

Even the idea that anyone else in the house was going, was a sort of reflected enjoyment, and conjured up a lively anticipation of the scene. . . . And when the Letter-Bell announced that the time was approaching, and its last receding sound lingered on the ear, or was lost in silence, how anxious and uneasy I became, lest she and her companion should not be in time to get good places--lest the curtain should draw up before they arrived

He thus recalls his own ability to enter into the feelings of others--to experience the "negative capability" of selfless sympathy with those around him. This third memory, then, is like the first two in presenting an essentially similar state of mind. However, Hazlitt characteristically specifies the general similarity by means of different particular examples.

As we mentioned in connection with the "Immortality" essay, this practice shows the workings of his aesthetic theory in his own writing. The memory of those leaving for the theatre is thus tied to, but also differentiated from, similar recollections.

The third memory of "The Letter-Bell" is then followed by a digression:

The punctuating of time at that early period--every thing that gives it an articulate voice--seems of the utmost consequence; for we do not know what scenes in the ideal world may run out of them: a world of interest may hang upon every instant, and we can hardly sustain the weight of future years which are contained im embryo in the most minute and inconsiderable passing events. . . .

The passage represents Hazlitt's suddenly standing back from his essay and stating what he has up to now been showing us--that any single incident in life may have the utmost consequence to it if considered properly. The thought re-echoes his introductory analogy of the insect under the microscope, though, of course, the values Hazlitt finds in his memories have more than the simple aesthetic values of the closely-examined insect; they also have the moral qualities always connected with imaginative sight. In this essay, specifically, the letter-bell is often a tie which binds Hazlitt to the human community.

He then cites an incident to specify his general

statement--he speaks of his running after the postman with a late letter, sending it off, and never regretting anything that he had written:

I am not like the person who, having sent off a letter to his mistress, who resided a hundred and twenty miles in the country, and disapproving, on second thoughts, of some expressions contained in it, took a post-chaise and four to follow and intercept it the next morning.

Such an example may have seemed to Hazlitt a microcosm of his life--the press of circumstances and the rush to send off essays in hurried attempts to secure money was indeed a pattern of his professional existence. And so, too, was his honesty in all that he wrote, even in the hack work, so that, on this score at least, he never did feel the need to retract his writings.

He moves into his fourth memory next; there is again no paragraph break, and little transition:

At other times, I have sat and watched the decaying embers in a little back painting-room (just as the wintry day declined), and brooded over the half-finished copy of a Rembrandt, or a landscape by Vangoyen, placing it where it might catch a dim gleam of light from the fire; while the Letter-Bell was the only sound that drew my thoughts to the world without, and reminded me that I had a task to perform in it.

This is a recollection of his solitary work as a painter; as such, it gives the opposite side of his third memory, which was introduced with the statement that the letter-bell "was a kind of alarm to break off from my work when there happened

to be company to dinner." The third and fourth memories balance each other: the one expresses the happiness of leaving the solitary world of painting to enter into the broader, diversified world of human activity; the other recounts the joy of immersing one's self in an intense pursuit of a single object--here, painting. Hazlitt's happiness in remembering his days as a painter springs from the fact that he was "wholly in his art"; his task was that "on which all his projects of ambition or pleasure were founded." His painting was a task of "'Entire affection,'" even in its "mechanical parts." The feeling of intensity which he remembers is that which he captures so well in his full essay "On Pedantry" (1817: iv, 80-88): "The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits, in which our whole attention and faculties are engaged, is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature." It is interesting, however, that this memory in "The Letter-Bell" apparently involves the selfless rather than the selfish imagination: "Certainly," says Hazlitt, "painting gives one a strong interest in nature and humanity" (i.e., external objects which draw one out of one's self). This whole passage, then, involving as it does the qualities of intensity, narrow focus, and a selfless imagination, is a recollection of an experience

of "gusto."⁴

The letter-bell appears again near the end of this fourth memory: "I used sometimes to hurry through this [mechanical] part of my occupation, while the Letter-Bell (which was my dinner-bell) summoned me to the fraternal board, where youth and hope 'Made good digestion wait on appetite'" This statement repeats the introduction to the third memory ("It was a kind of alarm to break off from my work when there happened to be company to dinner"); now, however, we have become acquainted with both experiences which the bell ties together: the intense absorption in work before the sound, and the feeling of "youth and hope" following it. The letter-bell is thus a linking device in another sense: not only does it tie Hazlitt to humanity--it also links in his mind the two generally opposite types of happiness he valued so highly, and serves as a balance point between them. The function of the bell in the third and fourth memories is thus much like its function in the first, where, too, its sound served as a transition point between opposite qualities of perception.

The next, brief paragraph in the essay is used for transition; it is also another example of Hazlitt's love of

⁴See Chapter V, below, for a detailed discussion of this term.

contrasts:

The dustman's-bell, with its heavy, monotonous noise, and the brisk, lively tinkle of the muffin-bell, have something in them, but not much. They will bear dilating upon with the utmost license of inventive prose. All things are not alike conductors to the imagination.

Other sorts of bells don't speak to Hazlitt's memory as immediately as does the letter-bell; it would require great ingenuity and "utmost license" of prose for an essay to be spun from them. Why then does the letter-bell speak to the writer so naturally when other bells don't? The answer is found in the next two paragraphs, comprising the fifth main division of the essay.

"The postman's double knock at the door the next morning is 'more germane to the matter,'" Hazlitt begins--i.e., this knock, associated with the letter-bell, is a better "conductor to the imagination" than is either the dustman's-bell or the muffin-bell. The reason it moves Hazlitt so much is that, like the letter-bell itself, it signifies a greater tie to other people, and it more readily engages the feelings of the heart than do other everyday sounds--such feelings, of course, being for Hazlitt an essential part of all truth and human value. He captures the "feeling" of the post well, near the start of paragraph four:

How that knock often goes to the heart! We distinguish to a nicety the arrival of the Two-penny or the General Post. The summons of the latter is louder and heavier as bringing news from a greater distance, and as, the longer it has been delayed, fraught with a deeper interest. We catch the sound of what is to be paid--eight-pence, nine-pence, a shilling--and our hopes generally rise with the postage. How we are provoked at the delay in getting change--at the servant who does not hear the door! Then if the postman passes, and we do not hear the expected knock, what a pang is there! It is like the silence of death--of hope!

Having established the feelings connected with the mails, Hazlitt increases and broadens his consideration of such passions in almost a geometrical progression, moving from the feelings he associates with a single postman to those he has while watching a single Mail-Coach (which he sees as "the messenger of fate") to those which spring up as he views (in memory) the very hub of the Mail-Coach network in the heart of London. "The finest sight in the metropolis is that of the Mail-Coaches setting off from Picadilly," he says; and a few sentences later:

Some persons think the sublimest object in nature is a ship launched on the bottom of the ocean: but give me, for my private satisfaction, the Mail-Coaches that pour down Piccadilly of an evening, tear up the pavement, and devour the way before them to the Land's-End!

The mails, carrying as they do the deepest passions of mankind--they "bind or sever hearts for ever," he says--are most striking to Hazlitt in a situation which impresses upon him the immense diversity and multiplicity of such passion. "Truth is

not one, but many," and the concrete picture of the range of human truths, vitalized by deep feelings, radiating out from Piccadilly to bind the whole nation, is very moving for him; indeed, he sees the mail depot as sacred, for he describes it in terms suggesting a ritual: the horses carry a "precious burden"; he says that "There is a peculiar secrecy and despatch, significant and full of meaning, in all the proceedings"; the passengers appear to be "borne on through the air as in a winged chariot"; and the coaches start off bearing "irrevocable scrolls." The sight of the Mail-Coaches leaving London was indeed the "sublimest object in nature" for him because in it he found an excellent objective correlative for some of his deepest feelings.

The final paragraph of the essay is made up largely of a quotation from Cowper's The Task, cited to represent Hazlitt's own feelings on watching the Mail-Coaches. The lines express just what he wants, for Cowper emphasizes the range and diversity of human truths carried in the mail; and all of the various communications cited involve deep feelings.

The final comments of the essay, that "the picturesque and dramatic do not keep pace with the useful and mechanical," are similar to statements which Hazlitt makes in "Why the Arts are Not Progressive" (iv, 160; xviii, 5, 7)--that progress in science, technology, and "mechanical" arts tends to

lead men away from natural and elemental sources of inspiration. The complaint is that society, which tends to impose more and more structures and filters upon perception with the passage of time, creates a world in itself apart from nature, which can be seen only with fresh sight. The Mail-Coach is thus less natural and poetic than the Post-Boy, as it involves more technological progress away from the natural state of man. A more extreme example is the final one Hazlitt cites:

The telegraphs that lately communicated the intelligence of the new revolution to all France within a few hours, are a wonderful contrivance; but they are less striking and appalling than the beacon-fires (mentioned in Aeschylus), which, lighted from hill-top to hill-top, announced the taking of Troy, and the return of Agamemnon.

His last thought is thus on the Spirit of the Age and its tendency to lose contact with basic sources of emotion. It is important to note, though, that throughout "The Letter-Bell" Hazlitt has dramatized the possibility--exemplified by his own life--of achieving not a rejection of filtered perception, but a balancing of it by fresh sight even within the conventions and social structures of the age. Thus the letter-bell ties the writer to his society and its conventional operations; but also, paradoxically, it frees him to perceive basic sources of inspiration within and beyond these conventions.

As we have mentioned, Hazlitt died a few days after he wrote this essay. Perhaps it was the composition of this masterful work--a meditation on what he saw as the basic elements of awareness that allow for human happiness--that enabled him finally to see his own life as having met his own standards of excellence. For he died content--his last words were, "Well, I've had a good life."

After "The Letter-Bell," such a valediction comes as no surprise.

CHAPTER V

"GUSTO"

"You cannot comprehend my definition of gusto, which you do not ascribe to any defect in yourself."
(1819: ix, 28)

The above reprimand to William Gifford is perhaps more peevish than just, for few terms in Hazlitt's works are as hard to pin down accurately as "gusto." Paul Elmer More says that "The word, now unfortunately falling into desuetude, connotes the power of intense enjoyment based on understanding."¹ Elisabeth Schneider comments that "Diderot writes of verve almost as often as Hazlitt does of gusto, and they appear to mean much the same thing, that is, intensity."² W.P. Albrecht writes: "To define 'truth of character' and then reveal 'the soul of nature,' a poet or painter must have the emotional intensity that Hazlitt calls 'gusto.'"³ Roy Park diverges somewhat from the em-

¹Shelburne Essays, p. 74.

²The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt, p. 58.

³Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination. p. 84.

phasis on seeing gusto as "intensity" in saying that "In a very general way gusto may be said to be the expression of [the] unique quality of objects and works of art. The work of art, or the dramatic performance of a role which succeeds in expressing this characteristic excellence, has gusto."⁴ I think, however, that an even more accurate definition of the term may be found if we approach it with a knowledge of Hazlitt's patterns of opposite qualities. When understood in the context of related remarks elsewhere in Hazlitt's Works, the brief essay "On Gusto" from The Round Table collection (1817: iv, 77-80) will be seen to contain great complexity--and inconsistency. As with other difficulties in Hazlitt's writings--though especially with "gusto"--it is unwise to take any one of the essayist's statements as the ultimate representation of his final opinion on the subject. Rather, I think, the truth can best be approximated by again taking an overview of the matter to determine the large patterns of thought involved.

The first paragraph of "On Gusto" offers something of a definition of the term, but I think this will be best comprehended if we first consider some of Hazlitt's general notions on art, and his comments on those artists whose

⁴Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age, p. 146.

works exemplify gusto. Indeed, after its initial paragraph, "On Gusto" is composed entirely of such examples--examples which, we must remember, are tied to other comments about the same artists, in different essays.

One of Hazlitt's most important ideas about artistic excellence is that each great artist is a specialist:

The greatest artists that have ever appeared are those who have been able to employ some one view or aspect of nature, and no more. Thus Titian was famous for colouring; Raphael for drawing; Correggio for the gradations, Rembrandt for the extremes of light and shade. The combined genius and powers of observation of all the great artists in the world would not be sufficient to convey the whole of what is contained in any one object in nature.

(ix, 218)

What determines each artist's specialty is the conformation of his individual mind:

how narrow is the sphere of human excellence, how distinct the line of pursuit which nature has marked out even for those whom she has most favoured! Thus in painting Raphael excelled in drawing, Titian in colouring, Rembrandt in chiaro scuro. A small part of nature was revealed to each by a peculiar felicity of conformation; and they would have made sad work of it, if each had neglected his own advantages to go in search of those of others, on the principle that genius is a large general capacity, transferred, by will or accident, to some particular channel."

(xvi, 188)⁵

Apparently, then, every great artist has a specific capacity to see one aspect of nature clearly, and no one can "trans-

⁵See also viii, 47.

fer" this capacity in order to see other aspects. This specialization is something that Hazlitt points out throughout his writings;⁶ it is also an important part of "On Gusto," for here, too, he catalogues the fortes of the great artists--and the gusto of each is found in a limited area (e.g., "There is a gusto in the colouring of Titian. . . . Michael Angelo's forms are full of gusto"). Indeed, he also says that Shakespeare's gusto is diminished precisely because of his universality: "The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakespeare takes from his gusto. The power he delights to show is not intense but discursive."

Narrowed scope is thus an essential ingredient in gusto--at least most of the time; for Hazlitt occasionally makes a statement that suggests the opposite. For example, in "On Gusto" itself he says:

Rubens had a great deal of gusto in his Fauns and Satyrs, and in all that expresses motion, but in nothing else. Rembrandt has it in everything; everything in his pictures has a tangible character. If he puts a diamond in the ear of a burgomaster's wife, it is of the first water; and his furs and stuffs are proof against a Russian winter. Raphael's gusto was only in expression

The gusto of Rubens and Raphael is thus limited, as it should be; but Rembrandt's, here, seems to be unlimited, despite Haz-

⁶See xvii, 4ln: "There is a certain pedantry, a given division of labour, an almost exclusive attention to some one object, which is necessary in Art, as in all the works of man." Cf. also iv, 151; vi, 149; xii, 291; xx, 297, 391.

litt's usual assertion that his excellence is confined to the use of chiaroscuro. Similarly, despite his statement here that Raphael is limited, he elsewhere suggests the contrary:

Raphael gave himself up to the diviner or lovelier impulse that breathes its soul over the face of things, being governed by a sense of reality and of general truth. There is nothing exclusive or repulsive in Raphael; he is open to all impressions alike, and seems to identify himself with whatever he saw that arrested his attention or could interest others. . . . Raphael was only a painter, but in that one art he seemed to pour out all the treasures and various excellence of nature, grandeur and scope of design, exquisite finishing, force

(xvii, 148)⁷

What Hazlitt says about an artist in "On Gusto," then, may not accord with his description of the same artist in another essay. And we cannot separate "On Gusto" from the context of his other works--as we have seen to the contrary, it is a safe rule that we can best make sense of the essayist's ambiguities precisely by placing them within this context. It follows then that if the exemplars of gusto have ambiguous or contradictory qualities, then Hazlitt's concept of gusto--based on such exemplars--is also ambiguous. Spe-

⁷This particular passage suggests that, in a broad sense, Raphael is limited because he is "only a painter" whereas Michelangelo is "painter, sculptor, architect." However, Hazlitt usually specifies very particular fortes of artists even within the one discipline of painting--which he does not do here.

cifically, there is an inconsistency about the involvement of narrowed range of awareness--in Raphael and Rembrandt it is sometimes present, sometimes not; and Hazlitt says that both of these artists have gusto.

Similarly, there is an ambiguity about which type of imagination (selfless or selfish) is characteristic of the "gusto" artists. Most of Hazlitt's comments on them indicate the presence of the selfless imagination (although, of course, the artist's ability to perceive nature directly, without filters or "mediums," is confined to a particular channel, like a prism that separates only one color of light from the natural spectrum). For example, Titian represents nature accurately:

. . . the limbs of his female figures have a luxurious softness and delicacy, which appears conscious of the pleasure of the beholder. As the objects themselves in nature would produce an impression on the sense, distinct from every other object, and having something divine in it, which the heart owns and the imagination consecrates, the objects in the picture preserve the same impression, absolute, unimpaired, stamped with all the truth of passion, the pride of the eye, and the charm of beauty.

Hazlitt elsewhere says the same thing of this artist, that he gives the "exact resemblance of individual nature" (xii, 286) and that he shares with Raphael the quality of unfiltered perception: "Titian . . . saw the colour of skin at once, without any intellectual film spread over it; Raphael painted the actions and passions of men, without any indirect process, as

he found them" (xii, 245).⁸

Hazlitt cites Raphael's selfless imagination on several occasions, saying that "Nature did not put him out. He was not too great a genius to copy what he saw" (x, 12); that he "invented according to nature" (xii, 284); and that he exhibited "intense feeling of what is beautiful and grand in nature" (xviii, 114). It is therefore most interesting that Hazlitt more than once contrasts Raphael to Michelangelo, who also is cited as an exemplar of gusto. In an 1827 essay on "The Vatican," for example, he writes:

[Raphael] seems to identify himself with whatever he saw that arrested his attention or could interest others. Michael Angelo studied for himself, and raised objects to the standards of his conception, by a formula or system: Raphael invented for others, and was guided only by sympathy with them. Michael Angelo was painter, sculptor, architect; but he might be said to make of each art a shrine in which to build up the stately and gigantic stature of his own mind. . . . Michael Angelo, in a word, stamped his own character on his works, or recast Nature in a mould of his own, leaving out much that was excellent: Raphael received his inspiration from without, and his genius caught the lambent flame of grace, of truth, and grandeur, which are reflected in his works with a light clear, transparent and unfading.

(xvii, 148)

The contrast between the selfless and the selfish imagination is obvious, especially in its use of characteristic diction (e.g., "mould," "transparent," etc.) In "On Gusto" Hazlitt

⁸Another of the "gusto" artists, Correggio, is also said to reflect "the pure light of nature on the canvas" (xviii, 42).

does not speak of Michelangelo's imagination per se; he simply speaks of the artist's figures and of how they are "firm, commanding, broad, and massy," showing "power" and "muscular strength." In this regard, though, a passage from the essayist's 1817 Encyclopaedia Britannica article on "Fine Arts" is revelant; after discussing Raphael, he again turns to Michelangelo:

There is more an appearance of abstract grandeur of form in Michael Angelo. He has followed up, has enforced, and expanded, as it were, a preconceived idea, till he sometimes seems to tread on the verge of caricature. His forms, however, are not middle, but extreme forms, massy, gigantic, supernatural. They convey the idea of the greatest size and strength in the figure, and in all the parts of the figure. Every muscle is swollen and turgid. This tendency to exaggeration would have been avoided, if Michael Angelo had recurred more constantly to nature, and had proceeded less on a scientific knowledge of the structure of the human body; for science gives only the positive form of the different parts, which the imagination may afterwards magnify, as it pleases, but it is nature alone which combines them with perfect truth and delicacy, in all the varities of motion and expression.
(xviii, 114-115)

The strength of Michelangelo's forms thus derives from "a preconceived idea" or a scientific bias rather than from nature. It is interesting, too, that the very next sentence in the passage offers one of the Elgin marbles as a contrast to Michelangelo: "It is fortunate that we can refer, in illustration of our doctrine, to the admirable fragments of the Theseus at Lord Elgin's, which shows the possibility of unit-

ing the grand and natural style in the highest degree."

Like Raphael's paintings, the Elgin marbles derive their power directly from nature.⁹ And they, too, are cited in "On Gusto" as exemplifying that quality. Thus Michelangelo, who is contrasted to both Raphael and the Greek statues, represents the selfish rather than the selfless imagination.

Rembrandt, too, has gusto; but again Hazlitt does not speak directly of which type of imagination he represents. And his comments elsewhere are contradictory. For example, in "On Genius and Common Sense" he writes:

If ever there was a man of genius, he [Rembrandt] was one, in the proper sense of the term. He lived in and revealed to others a world of his own, and might be said to have invented a new view of nature. He did not discover things out of nature, in fiction or fairy land, or make a voyage to the moon 'to descry new lands, rivers, or mountains in her spotty globe,' but saw things in nature that everyone had missed before him, and gave others eyes to see them with. This is the test and triumph of originality, not to shew us what has never been, and what we may therefore easily never have dreamt of, but to point out to us what is before our eyes and under our feet, though we have had no suspicion of its existence,

⁹See also, for example, x, 168n:

"[The Elgin marbles] are the finest forms in the most striking attitudes, and with every thing in its place, proportion, and degree, uniting the ease, truth, force, and delicacy of Nature. They shew nothing but the artist's thorough comprehension of, and entire docility to that great teacher. There is no petit-maitreship, no pedantry, no attempt at a display of science, or at forcing the parts into an artificial symmetry, but it is like cutting a human body out of a block of marble, and leaving it to act for itself with all the same springs, levers, and internal machinery."

for want of sufficient strength of intuition, of
determined grasp of mind to seize and retain it.
(viii, 43)

Rembrandt's reliance on external nature for his art indicates the presence of the selfless imagination; his capturing of the truth of nature is also suggested in the essay "Is Genius Conscious of Its Powers?" (xii, 120): "So much do Rembrandt's pictures savour of the soul and body of reality, that the thoughts seem identical with the objects."

On the other hand, though, many other of Hazlitt's writings indicate that he thought Rembrandt had a filtering or selfish imagination. For example, the essay on the "Fine Arts," after speaking of Vandyke ("The objects in his pictures . . . are presented to the eye without passing through any indirect medium"), says this of Rembrandt:

If ever there was a man of genius in the art, it was Rembrandt. He might be said to have created a medium of his own, through which he saw all objects. . . . He took any object, he cared not what, how mean soever in form, colour, and expression, and from the light and shade which he threw upon it, it came out gorgeous from his hands. . . . His vision acquired a lynx-eyed sharpness from the artificial obscurity to which he had accustomed himself.

(xviii, 122)

References to the creation of a "medium" and to "artificial" obscurity indicate a filtering imagination. Hazlitt also implies a contrast between Rembrandt and two "natural" artists in a comment to Northcote: "I mentioned that I thought

Sir Joshua more like Rembrandt than either Titian or Vandyke: he enveloped objects in the same brilliant haze of a previous mental conception" (xi, 198)--much as Michelangelo worked from "a preconceived idea." Similarly, in speaking of Wordsworth Hazlitt sometimes alludes to the similarity of his filtering and selfish imagination and Rembrandt's:

【Wordsworth's】 poems bear a distinct resemblance to some of Rembrandt's landscapes, who, more than any other painter, created the medium through which he saw nature.

(iv, 120-121; repeated xix, 19)

I am afraid I shall hardly write so satisfactory a character of Mr. Wordsworth, though he, too, like Rembrandt, has a faculty of making something out of nothing, that is, out of himself, by the medium through which he sees and with which he clothes the barrenest subject.

(viii, 43-44)

The citation of Rembrandt as an example of gusto, then, may imply either a selfless or a selfish imagination--Hazlitt himself is inconsistent on the point.

There are other inconsistencies in Hazlitt's citation of Rubens as an exemplar of gusto. The "Fine Arts" article says:

Rubens is the prince of Flemish painters. Of all the great painters, he is perhaps the most artificial.--the one who painted most from his own imagination,--and, what was almost the inevitable consequence, the most of a mannerist.

(xviii, 120-121)

However, a few sentences later, Hazlitt apparently says that Rubens presented at least one aspect of nature (flesh) with-

out any artificial distortions: "He has given to his flesh greater transparency and freshness than any other painter; and this excellence he had from nature." Does this unfiltered portrayal of one aspect of nature, then, indicate that Rubens' flesh shows gusto? It seems as if it should--but in "On Gusto" itself Hazlitt says: "Rubens has a great deal of gusto in his Fauns and Satyrs, and in all that expresses motion, but in nothing else." And he also contrasts Rubens' portrayal of flesh (he "makes his flesh-colour like flowers") to Titian's ("Titian's is like flesh, and like nothing else")--and here it is Titian and not Rubens whose flesh shows gusto. Hazlitt's thoughts on Rubens, then, are rather muddled regarding both the type of imagination he shows, and in what "specialty" his gusto appears.

But despite the ambiguity about which type of imagination is shown by the different artists cited as examples, Hazlitt's opening paragraph apparently indicates that the selfless imagination is what he intends to imply:

Gusto in art is power or passion defining any object. . . . there is hardly any object entirely devoid of expression, without some character of power belonging to it, some precise association with pleasure or pain: and it is in giving this truth of character from the truth of feeling . . . that gusto consists.

Evidently the capturing of a quality belonging to external objects themselves is involved. Even the "association with

pleasure or pain" is something that Hazlitt saw (or tried to see) as existing in objects themselves rather than in their human viewer.¹⁰ If Hazlitt did indeed intend "gusto" to imply an unfiltered view of a particular aspect of nature--obtained by the use of a channelled selfless imagination--then his use of Michelangelo and Rembrandt (not to mention Milton and Pope) as examples is rather puzzling.¹¹

Let us assume, though, that he did intend to imply the presence of that type of imagination which perceives nature directly and immediately; there is still, then, a further distinction to be made. Those artists who exemplify gusto must capture the internal principles of their subjects rather than merely their superficial outward characteristics. Thus, for example, even though Vandyke is true to nature in his paintings,¹² he presents only its surface:

Vandyke's flesh-colour, though it has great truth and purity, wants gusto. It has not the internal character, the living principle in it. It is a smooth surface, not a warm, moving mass. It is painted without passion, with indifference.

Claude's landscapes show a similar shortcoming:

¹⁰ See above, Chapter I, p. 13.

¹¹ See also xviii, 18, for a passage which indicates that "nature" is not necessary for gusto: "Though neither the colouring nor the expression of this picture is natural, there is a harmony and a gusto in both that pleases the eye and reconciles the understanding to it."

¹² See above, p. 148; also viii, 318.

Claude's landscapes, perfect as they are, want gusto. This is not easy to explain. They are perfect abstractions of the visible images of things; they speak the visible language of nature truly. They resemble a mirror or a microscope. To the eye only they are more perfect than any other landscapes that ever were or will be painted; they give more of nature, as cognisable by one sense alone; but they lay an equal stress on all visible impressions. They do not interpret one sense by another; they do not distinguish the character of different objects as we are taught, and can only be taught, to distinguish them by their effect on the different senses. That is, his eye wanted imagination: it did not strongly sympathize with his other faculties. He saw the atmosphere, but he did not feel it.

There are different skeins that are important in this tangled commentary. Hazlitt says, for example, that the landscapes "do not interpret one sense by another" and that Claude's eye "did not strongly sympathize with his other faculties." This is an echo of a comment made in the second paragraph of the essay, that "In a word, gusto in painting is where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another." It is a way of saying that the "internal principle" of objects must be captured organically, that one quality of an object cannot simply be mechanically separated from others. It implies that the pulse of any one sense flows through all of the others, too, and that therefore the presentation of any one sensory aspect of an object--if captured organically--must imply other sensory experiences in it, too. Thus, for example, Hazlitt says in an essay on "The Marquis of Stafford's Gallery"

that Titian's coloring appeals to the senses of taste and hearing as well as sight: "Every where tone, not form, predominates--there is not a distinct line in the picture--but a gusto, a rich taste of colour is left upon the eye as if it were the palate, and the diapason of picturesque harmony is full to overflowing" (x, 33). Hazlitt's analysis of West's Christ Rejected presents another passage which points out that gusto implies organicism rather than mechanism:

We might sum up our opinion in one word, by saying, that there is in the present picture an absolute want of what is called gusto throughout; nor can we describe our idea of Mr. West's style in general better than by saying that it is the reverse of Raphael's. The difference is this. In Raphael, every muscle and nerve has intense feeling. The same divine spirit breathes from every part; it either agitates the inmost frame, or plays in gentle undulations on the trembling surface. . . . the whole is bursting with expression. But Mr. West makes no use whatever of the movable frame of the countenance, the only language it possesses . . . or if he does avail himself of this flexible machinery, it is only by rule and method. The effect is not that which the soul of passion impresses on it, and which the soul of genius alone can seize; but such as might be given to wooden puppets or pasteboard figures, pulled by wires . . .

(xviii, 33)

The diction itself ("breathes," "bursting," vs. "pasteboard figures") expresses the important contrast of portraying the subject as animated by an internal living principle rather than by mechanical external "wires."

When Hazlitt is speaking of "gusto," he frequently uses the terms "passion," "feeling," or "intensity" to con-

note an artist's capturing of an organic internal principle in an object. These terms are always found close to his assertions that an artist does or does not succeed in getting below the surface of what he is trying to paint--indeed, so closely are they associated with such assertions that these terms often serve as "shorthand" references which by themselves connote that quality of capturing the internal life of the object represented. Thus, when Hazlitt says that Vandyke's flesh color "has not the internal character, the living principle in it. . . It is painted without passion, with indifference," he is simply repeating the same idea. Similarly, when he writes that Claude "saw the atmosphere, but he did not feel it," he is repeating the point he made a few sentences earlier, that this artist presents only the superficial, "visible" aspect of nature, and not this aspect as it is organically related to all other sensible characteristics in nature. Unlike Vandyke and Claude, Rembrandt (when he is said to have a selfless imagination) does interpret one sense by another--and he therefore has the "intensity" of feeling that they lack:

It seems as if he had dug [his landscapes] out of nature. Everything is so true, so real, so full of all the feelings and associations which the eye can suggest to the other senses, that we immediately take as strong an affection to them as if they were our home--the very place where we were brought up. No length of time could

add to the intensity of the impression they convey.
(xviii, 123)¹³

The term "intensity" thus often has a particular connotation in connection with "gusto." However, it sometimes seems to indicate simply the great energy of the artist, as in a comment on Milton from "On Milton's Versification," also from The Round Table: "Milton had as much of what is meant by gusto as any poet. He forms the most intense conception of things, and then embodies them by a single stroke of his pen. Force of style is perhaps his first excellence" (iv, 38). This foreshadows Hazlitt's statements on the poet from the following year (1818) in "On Shakespeare and Milton," that "He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. . . . In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakespeare, scarcely any" (v, 58). Milton's "intensity" is thus the emotion that surges from the concentrated, forceful power of his own mind; and this is Hazlitt's usual usage of the term in most contexts.

From all this, then, we might think that "intensity" in one form or another is a necessary element of gusto. But

¹³See also x, 45, and especially x, 273, for other similar uses of "intensity"--in these instances in connection with Raphael's ability to capture the internal spirit of a subject.

here, too, there are contradictions, even as there were when Hazlitt spoke of the elements of narrowed scope and the selfless imagination. Thus, for example, in the "Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds" (1820) he says: "One great proof and beauty of works of true genius, is the ease, simplicity, and freedom from conscious effort which pervades them" (xvi, 188)--he then goes on to specify the particular artists he means ("Thus in painting, Raphael excelled in drawing, Titian in colouring, Rembrandt in chiaro scuro"), indicating that the "ease" he speaks of is a characteristic of the "gusto" artists. And "ease" and "freedom from conscious effort" are certainly not a characteristic of someone like Milton as described in "On Gusto" itself. In another similar passage, though, he again specifies "ease" rather than "intensity" as a characteristic of the "gusto" artists; writing in "Is Genius Conscious of Its Powers" in 1826 he says:

The greatest power operates unseen, and executes its appointed task with as little ostentation as difficulty. . . . It is only where our incapacity begins, that we begin to feel the obstacles, and to set an undue value on our triumph over them. Correggio, Michael Angelo, Rembrandt, did what they did without premeditation or effort--their works came from their minds a a natural birth.

(xii, 118)

"Gusto," then, is a very ambiguous term. And the problem of its definition is further complicated by Hazlitt's occasional use of it as a mere synonym for "enthusiasm," as

in a comment from Table-Talk in 1821 about surgeon John Hunter: "He would have set about cutting up the carcase of a whale with the same greatness of gusto that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble" (viii, 85). The term again means simply "enthusiasm" in the 1827 essay "Why Heroes of Romances are Insipid," when it is used in reference to one of Godwin's characters: "The case is different in St. Leon. The author's resuscitated hero there quaffs joy, love, and immortality with a considerable gusto, and with appropriate manifestations of triumph" (xviii, 253). Such simple uses of the term, however, are rare in the Works.

A consistent definition of "gusto" simply cannot be offered, for Hazlitt himself did not always use the term with one meaning in mind. As we have seen even in "On Gusto" itself there are statements and examples which do not match with each other; and Hazlitt's thoughts on the subject are by no means confined to this one essay--further inconsistencies turn up as we trace "gusto" elsewhere. It is clear, though, that various of the essayist's usual oppositions are involved in his usage of the word. And one does get the sense that one particular combination of elements is most often intended--though, again, this combination is by no means absolute. A statement from "On Genius and Common Sense" in 1821 comes

closest to the mark; even though Hazlitt does not specifically use the word "gusto" in it, I believe that he has the same idea in mind when he writes: "It is not then the acuteness of organs or extent of capacity that constitutes rare genius or produces the most exquisite models of art, but an intense sympathy with some one beauty or distinguishing characteristic in nature" (viii, 49). The latter part of this statement, with its combination of these italicized elements--if we add the qualification that "intense" connotes the capturing of the organic inner principle of the object being portrayed, rather than its mere surface--gives us the best general definition of "gusto." But we cannot dismiss the fact that important contradictions can be found for every one of these key elements. We must simply realize that Hazlitt was inconsistent in his definition, exemplification, and usage of the word. We can take some comfort, though, in also recognizing that the various contradictions fall into familiar patterns.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

"We must therefore work with the
instruments that are allotted
us; and no man can resist
the spirit of the age
in which he lives."
(1828: xiv, 132)

The relative importance that Hazlitt attached to the opposite types of perception--structured, filtered, or egotistical vs. immediate or selfless; narrowed or channelled vs. universal and open; intense vs. tranquil--is not an easy matter to determine; this question, though, is of great importance both to an understanding of Hazlitt's general thoughts on life and art and to an assessment of his conception of the spirit of the age in which he lived. It is certainly true, for instance, that running through his writings is a clear thread of admiration for figures who can lose themselves entirely while being open to the subtlest influences of nature; and such admiration is frequently emphasized by a contrasting disapprobation for mannered, artificial, "abstract," or single-minded artists and thinkers. This thread is evident in such

diverse contrasts as those of Shakespeare's plays vs. his sonnets (iv, 358), Addison vs. Steele (vii, 99), Shakespeare vs. Beaumont and Fletcher (vi, 250), Mlle. Mars vs. Mme. Pasta (xii, 324f.), Raphael vs. Guido (xii, 284), Byron vs. Scott (xii, 319), and Scott vs. Rizzio (xviii, 350) to name but a few. One might be tempted to see Hazlitt's preferences as simply one-sided along these lines, especially since there are few contrasts when wide-ranging, selfless perception is criticized in relation to its opposite. And when criticism of Shakespearean qualities is advanced, it is often concerned mainly with the point that too great a range of concern dissipates a man's effectiveness; only by implication, often, is the frequently concomitant quality of selflessness looked at unfavorably. Nor, on such occasions, does Hazlitt usually criticize the selfless imagination with the vehemence he often reserves for the selfish.

Still it is unwise to say simply that Hazlitt advocated selfless perception as his ideal; the matter is more complex than this. As he wrote in 1828:

Everything has its turn in this chequered scene of things, unless we prevent it from taking its turn by over-rigid conditions, or drive men to despair or the most callous effrontery, by erecting a standard of perfection, to which no one can conform in reality!

(xvii, 347)

Hazlitt recognized the danger--and, indeed, the impossibility--

of demanding perfection from "a creature like man, whose 'very name is frailty,' and who is a compound of contradictions" (xvi, 406); as in "On Going a Journey," he could not blind himself to the fact that men naturally have limited, personally filtered vision.¹ And he had a variety of attitudes towards this reality of human nature--he by no means saw such limitation, or egotism, or filtered perception of nature, or "abstraction" as always an undesirable thing.

Sometimes he saw it as engendering its own class of excellence, inferior to that springing from an immediate openness to nature--but excellent nevertheless. Thus, for example, while he admires the truth to nature of Cervantes' Don Quixote, he still sees value--though not as much--in the "mannerism" of Le Sage's Gil Blas: "Gil Blas is, next to Don Quixote, more generally read and admired than any other novel--and, in one sense, deservedly so: for it is at the head of its class, though that class is very different from, and inferior to the other" (xvi, 10; also vi, 111-112). Similarly, in "On the Question of Whether Pope was a Poet" (xx, 89-92), Hazlitt views Pope as a limited poet of "art" who is thus inferior to a universal "poet of nature" like Shakespeare; however, the essayist's main contention cannot be ignored: "The question whether

¹viii, 187-188; see also above, Chapter IV, pp. 96-98.

Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort." And his idea here ties in with a comment from the Lectures on the English Poets, that the "artificial" poets are not far separated from the "natural":

Dryden and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, were of the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class, ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in, and obscured by a greater degree of power and genius in those before them: what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind, stands by itself, and tells for the whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakespeare: Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame.²

(v, 68-69)

Hazlitt's admiration of non-Shakespearean poets is also evident in his comments on Wordsworth; though he is a poet of "paradox," and such writers rank at the bottom of Hazlitt's

²Hazlitt's characterization here of Milton as a poet of "nature" is atypical; cf. my ensuing discussion.

famous scale of poetry (v, 82),³ he still receives high praise indeed (e.g., iv, 111-112, 115-116; v, 156; ix, 243; xi, 86-95; xii, 104).

At other times, Hazlitt simply compares the opposite types of perception without expressing any preference, implying that equal value lies on either side. Thus Milton, who covered his poetry with "religious zeal" and who, like Dante, wrote with "a spirit of partisanship," and who was in all respects a "direct contrast" to Shakespeare (v, 56, 66) is given a rank with Shakespeare as one of the greatest poets of the language (v, 46). Similarly, the essayist says that "We are not going to give a preference" when he compares Moore and Byron (xvi, 411f.), who again exemplify the opposite generic qualities. And often he simply describes someone as the "reverse" of someone else, again without expressing preference--e. g., Wordsworth "is the reverse of Walter Scott in his de-

³I think we must be careful about placing too much emphasis on seeing this scale of poetry as a "constant" factor in Hazlitt's criticism; Hazlitt himself was not especially consistent in his use of it. Thus, for example, while he says that imaginative poetry of the time of Elizabeth ranks highest, he elsewhere recognizes great variety within the periods before the Caroline age (the next step down on the scale), as when he says, "the dramatic paradoxes of Beaumont and Fletcher are, to all appearance, tinged with an infusion of personal vanity and laxity of principle" (vi, 250). This is a comment which he could just as easily apply to Wordsworth or Byron. Conversely, he says that Coleridge (who lived in the age of paradox) showed "'that fine madness . . . which our first poets had'" (viii, 183).

fects and excellences. He as all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses" (v, 156). The entire essay "On Going a Journey"--widely recognized as one of Hazlitt's greatest--similarly concludes with a careful balance of the opposites (viii, 181-189).

There are still other times when Hazlitt sees the narrow, egotistical, individual, or prejudiced viewpoint as a better or more appropriate stance than its opposite. Indeed, he sometimes sees success in life as springing from these qualities (e.g., xii, 197), although the observation is often mixed with irony. In "On Pedantry," however, he positively relishes the feeling of intensity that comes from narrowing one's range of attention to a small circle (iv, 80-88); indeed, in this essay he further says that "To take away the force of habit and prejudice entirely, is to strike at the root of our personal existence" (iv, 84). Elsewhere he castigates the politician Brougham for not appealing in his speeches to a "substratum of prejudice" (xvii, 8), for the orator consequently fails to move his audiences. Hazlitt again sees value in prejudice (i.e., views whose value derives from personal sources or accepted systems rather than from external nature or objective reality) in two of his greatest heroes, Rousseau and Godwin, whose "egotism" inspired the great ideals of individual liberty in the period of the French

Revolution. Furthermore, Hazlitt's biography of Napoleon, his greatest hero, is a tribute to the monumental individualism of the man who, in the essayist's view, protected and extended these ideals. And, too, the author of the Essay on the Principles of Human Action, which establishes a philosophical basis for selflessness, is also the author of the "Project for a New Theory of Civil and Criminal Legislation," which theory is founded on a principle of self-interest (xix, 302-320).⁴

Hazlitt thus had a considerable range of attitudes about the importance and value of selflessness, openness to experience, and direct contact with nature as opposed to egotism, prejudice, artificiality, systematization, and abstraction--all of which involve filtered or structured perception that substitutes personal values for those of external nature. One cannot simply say that he liked one stance and disliked the other--he saw positive value, and drawbacks, on both sides of the coin. It is true that his criticisms of filtered or narrowed perception are greater in number, and more vehement, than his criticisms of open selflessness; but the reason for

⁴One of its tenets, for example, is that "self-love is a natural guarantee for our self-interest"; and its general conclusion is: "It seems, then, that a system of just and useful laws may be constructed nearly, if not wholly, on the principle of the right of self-defence, or the security for person, libery, and property" (xix, 303, 319).

this is obvious. Hazlitt was not an ivory-tower intellectual but a front-rank critic in daily contact with the everyday people and attitudes of his time; he was thus constantly exposed to ignorance, prejudice, and entrenched political conservatism which such journals as the Quarterly Review and Blackwood's Magazine used as a basis for attacking not only his aesthetics but his very person as well. His milieu was obviously more filled with narrow-mindedness and prejudice than with selflessness. To bring about a reasonable balance Hazlitt obviously had to attack filtered perception and advocate its opposite much more than to do the reverse; due to the circumstances, an imbalanced approach was necessary to bring about a balance of truth. And Hazlitt realized this. In 1828, for example, speaking of his own "paradoxical" writing he says:

All abstract reasoning is in extremes, or only takes up one view of a question, or what is called the principle of the thing; and if you want to give this popularity and effect, you are in danger of running into extravagance and hyperbole. I have had to bring out some obscure distinction, or to combat some strong prejudice, and in doing this with all my might, may have often over-shot the mark. It is easy to correct the excess of truth afterwards. I have been accused of inconsistency, for writing an essay, for instance, on the Advantages of Pedantry, and another, on the Ignorance of the Learned, as if ignorance had not its comforts as well as knowledge.
(xvii, 312-313)

This, of course, is in accord with his comment from 1819:

my love of paradox may, I think, be accounted for from the necessity of counteracting the obstinacy of prejudice. If I have been led to carry a remark too far, it was because others would not allow it to have any force at all. My object was to shew the latent operation of some unsuspected principle, and I therefore took only some one view of that particular subject.
(ix, 30)⁵

A typical example of Hazlitt's taking "one view" of a subject is his statement from "On the Spirit of Partisanship" (1821) that "There is nothing more contemptible than party-spirit in one point of view" (xvii, 35); it is obvious from his words that, even while condemning his subject, he realizes that he could take another viewpoint.

Hazlitt's personal "ideal" approach to life and art was thus a mixture of perspectives, which, in toto, were corrective to each other. Attractive as the open, innocent, or "existential" stance was to him, he realized that this alone does not constitute wisdom; rather, he saw it as a corrective to other valid sources of wisdom which are also necessary, and which are in turn corrective of the defects of openness. He was a realist, fully cognizant that no conception of happiness was worthwhile which did not allow one to live in the world of everyday realities. Detached poetic ease is fine, he thought; but since one must also earn his daily bread in an imperfect world, one would do best not to neglect the sources

⁵See above, Chapter III, p. 73.

of happiness that this world, too, extends to the perceptive man. His mixture of perspectives thus allowed him to maximize the potential for satisfaction within the ultimately inescapable parameters of everyday human life.

An example of Hazlitt's ideal mixture is found in his description of Neufchatel in Notes of a Journey through France and Italy (1826):

This kind of retreat, where there is nothing to surprise, nothing to disgust, nothing to draw the attention out of itself, uniting the advantages of society and solitude, of simplicity and elegance, and where the mind can indulge in a sort of habitual and self-centered satisfaction, is the only one which I should never feel a wish to quit. The golden mean is, indeed, an exact description of the mode of life I should like to lead--of the style I should like to write

(x, 297)

Introversion vs. extroversion, simplicity vs. art--the elements are found throughout the essayist's works. And Hazlitt saw a similar golden mean in the person of Charles Lamb, his only life-long close friend, of whom he says (in The Spirit of the Age): he "occupies that nice point between egotism and disinterested humanity" (xi, 180); Hazlitt's admiration for him was thus very deep indeed.⁶

⁶Hazlitt believed at times that Lamb's imagination filtered his perception, as in "On Going a Journey" (1822; cf. above, Chapter IV, p. 87); he also believed, at other times, that it entirely removed the filters of self from his outlook, as noted, for example, in a comment from "Character of the Country People" on Lamb making himself an object of

Seeing Hazlitt's ideal as one of mixed perspectives needs particular emphasis at the present time because there is apparently an incipient blind spot about this matter in recent criticism. W.P. Ablrecht, for example, writes that "Politically as well as aesthetically, [Hazlitt] urges disinterestedness: the sympathetic identification that is needed for imaginative fulfillment."⁷ I agree with this statement, as far as it goes; but it is not the whole truth--the other side of the coin needs more emphasis. Similarly, Roy Park, who calls Hazlitt "the most outspoken and consistent English critic of abstraction in the early nineteenth century,"⁸ writes that "For Hazlitt, the presence of the self blurred the essential openness characteristic of his experiential or 'pluralist' viewpoint, and man's capacity for experiencing morally the reality or significance of human life was so much the more diminished."⁹ He also states that "The artist, for Hazlitt, is characterized by an openness to the whole of experience in all its complexity and variety as a

laughter: " . . . the abstract idea of the jest of the thing prevailing in his mind (as it always does) over the sense of personal dignity" (1819: xvii, 66-67).

⁷Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination, p. 148.

⁸Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age, p. 77.

⁹Ibid., p. 59.

result of his greater sensitivity of feeling."¹⁰ Park's perception of Hazlitt's admiration of Shakespearean qualities is clear enough; however, he does not clearly see the positive value which Hazlitt attached to the other type of artistic stance. For example, after discussing Hazlitt's views of Milton, Spenser, and Montaigne, he says that "[Hazlitt's] criticism of Montaigne is important for a number of reasons. Its open hostility to abstraction is entirely characteristic. The deference shown to Spenser and Milton in spite of their abstraction is thus exceptional."¹¹ I hope I have sufficiently shown by now that Hazlitt's opposition to abstraction is not "entirely" characteristic, and that it is certainly not consistent. Furthermore, Park's statement contains a misleading implication--Hazlitt liked Milton not in spite of his filtered perception but rather precisely because of it. Milton was not an "exception" to the rule; rather, he simply accorded with another, opposite rule.¹² Hazlitt did

¹⁰Ibid., p. 109.

¹¹Ibid., p. 173.

¹²In this regard it is interesting that Northcote says, in Conversation the Tenth (1830: xi, 246), that "There is a faculty that enlarges and beautifies objects, even beyond nature. It is for this reason that we must, reluctantly perhaps, give the preference to Milton over Shakespeare." Hazlitt does not disagree; indeed, it is possible that he is using Northcote here as a mouthpiece for his own opinions, as he does elsewhere in the Conversations.

not have merely one standard of excellence. A blind spot similar to that in Park's criticism is noticeable, too, in Herschel Baker's failure to understand Hazlitt's admiration of the "stiff and formal" John Kemble.¹³ Again, these are precisely the qualities that caused him to admire the actor.

This blind spot extends, too, into various assessments of The Spirit of the Age itself. G.D. Klingopulous, for example, offers an overly simple commentary:

Few works of criticism illustrate as vividly as does The Spirit of the Age those extra-literary considerations which should help to form a critic's awareness of his own times. Hazlitt is concerned to show that rationalists such as Bentham and Godwin had much to learn about induction from the intuitive poets. It was the poets who were concrete, the rationalists who were abstract.¹⁴

There is an implication here that Hazlitt saw Godwin's rationalism as something which prevented him from making a vital contribution to the age; but this is not true. W.P. Albrecht, in his review of Park's book, also emphasizes only the negative aspect of Hazlitt's thoughts on narrowness and filtered perception: "[Hazlitt] relies on dramatic particulars to show how narrow rationalism, transcendental systems, class prejudice, or other forms of 'egotism'--enforced by external pres-

¹³See above, Chapter IV, pp. 102-103.

¹⁴"The Spirit of the Age in Prose," in A Guide to English Literature, Vol. V: From Blake to Byron (London: Cassell & Company, Ltd., 1962), p. 151.

suress--blocked the imagination and prevented able men from fulfilling their powers."¹⁵ Albrecht elsewhere says that "Hazlitt, like Arnold, believed that his age and its representative men were the victims of abstraction";¹⁶ and Park says that this abstraction is "the greatest vice of the age."¹⁷ I cannot disagree with such statements that note Hazlitt's condemnation of abstraction; I can point out, however, that the essayist's idea of the Spirit of the Age was more complex than this, and that it involved a mixture of perspectives--which saw value on both sides--analogous to the patterns that characterize his work as a whole. His criticisms of the figures in Spirit imply two sets of standards, not one. But before we insist on any conclusions, let us look at the evidence within Hazlitt's great work itself.

How does Hazlitt himself define the Spirit of the Age? Many references within the book do indeed see this Spirit as one of undesirable abstraction, prejudice, and filtered perception. In the essay on "William Godwin," for example, Hazlitt notes that "The Spirit of the Age was never more fully

¹⁵"Ralph M. Wardle, Hazlitt (Univ. of Nebraska, 1971) and Roy Park, Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age (Oxford, 1971): A Review," Wordsworth Circle, III, 2 (Spring, 1972), 109.

¹⁶Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination, p. 61.

¹⁷Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age, p. 202.

shown than in its treatment of this writer--its love of paradox and change, its dastard submission to prejudice and to the fashion of the day" (xi, 16). In "Mr. Coleridge," he characterizes the age as one of "besotted prejudice and loathsome power" (xi, 34). He concludes his essay on Horne Tooke with "a curious example of the Spirit of the Age," that Lindley Murray's Grammar, which he viewed as hopelessly conservative and traditional (even to the point of "blindness and obstinacy"), was in much greater demand than Tooke's Diversions of Purley, which offered a "geniune anatomy of our native tongue" (xi, 56-57). Because he was "not subject to prejudice," Tooke threw aside the "veil" of custom that covered language, and "penetrated to the naked truth of things" (xi, 54)--but this caused his work to be rejected by the "prejudice and party-spirit" of the age. The undesirable abstraction of the times is again implied in Hazlitt's criticism of Byron, that he "panders to the spirit of the age, and goes to the very edge of extreme and licentious speculation" (xi, 76); as the essayist explains a few sentences later:

In a word, we think that poetry moves best within the circle of nature and received opinion: speculative theory and subtle casuistry are forbidden ground to it. But Lord Byron often wanders into this ground wantonly, wilfully, and unwarrantably. . . . The strength of his imagination leads him to indulge in fantastic opinions; the elevation of his rank sets censure at defiance. He becomes a pampered egotist.

Byron thus covers over nature with his own egotistical "speculative theory." Hazlitt points out the problem again in the essay on "Mr. Canning," in which he says that the "Genius of the Age" is one "in which words have obtained a mastery over things" (xi, 157)--once more suggesting the dominance, and undesirability, of mental structures which block the direct perception of nature.¹⁸

If we follow this line alone, then, we might conclude that Hazlitt viewed the Spirit of the Age as simply one of abstraction, which he viewed as totally undesirable.

But there are also other remarks which indicate that Hazlitt had another view of the age. Sometimes he suggests that the times were characterized by a surge of human awareness that broke through the prejudice. The Spirit of the Age, from this point of view, is one of a struggle to escape from prejudice or artificiality, rather than one of submission to it. In "Mr. Coleridge," for example, Hazlitt says that "The spirit of monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age" (xi, 37); thus, the spirit here is not abstraction but rather "the flame of liberty" struggling to overcome abstraction (as

¹⁸In a London Magazine essay of 1820, too, Hazlitt makes a case that "a bias to abstraction is evidently, then, the reigning spirit of the age" (xviii, 305) in order to explain why his contemporaries were producing no good dramatic poetry.

represented by monarchy). A similar positive view of the tendency of the age is noticeable in a criticism of Scott: "it is thus he administers charms and philtres to our love of Legitimacy, makes us conceive a horror of all reform, civil, political, or religious, and would fain put down the Spirit of the Age" (xi, 66). The views expressed in the opening paragraphs of "Mr. Wordsworth" (xi, 86-87) also present the age as marked by the surge of the "natural" as opposed to the "artificial." Here, Wordsworth is uncharacteristically described as a poet whose eye is "ever fixed on the face of nature" rather than on himself; and the poet's concern for nature is what Hazlitt means to imply when he says that "Mr. Wordsworth's genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age." At the end of the same paragraph, and the beginning of the next, he again shows that, here, he sees Wordsworth's poetry as in accord with the movement of the age in breaking through filtered perception:

In a word, his poetry is founded on setting up an opposition (and pushing it to the utmost length) between the natural and the artificial; between the spirit of humanity, and the spirit of fashion and of the world!

It is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with the revolutionary movement of the age; the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments.

In the essay on "Mr. Jeffrey," he says that the "talent" behind the Edinburgh Review is "characteristic of the Spirit of

the Age" (xi, 127); and Jeffrey, its editor, "has a great range of knowledge," "is neither a bigot nor an enthusiast," and "is not wedded to any dogma" (xi, 130). And in opposition to the Spirit of the Age is William Gifford's journal ("it is the express object of the Quarterly Review to discountenance and extinguish that spirit, both in theory and practice") which is marked by "prejudice" and servile acceptance of "authority" (xi, 127, 128).

There is thus another line in the book which sees the Spirit of the Age not as abstraction but rather as its opposite. However, in either of these lines of opinion Hazlitt still sees narrowed, structured, or filtered perception as a vice. We must therefore look more closely at his opinions on this particular subject.

In the essay on "Lord Byron," he contrasts the opposite types of artists (the other being exemplified by Scott) and concludes with a "decided preference given to Sir Walter Scott over Lord Byron" (xi, 71-72). He says of the former that he "draws aside the curtain, and the veil of egotism is rent In this point of view, the Author of Waverley is one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived, by emancipating the mind from petty, narrow, and bigotted prejudices." Note, though, that Hazlitt specifies "In this point

of view," which shows his conscious awareness that he recognized, and could assume if he chose to, the opposite point of view about Scott--which he in fact does in the essay on "William Godwin" (xi, 24-25). In this essay, Hazlitt's ranking of the opposite types is reversed: Godwin is praised for the Byron-like characteristics of intensity, narrowness, and egotism while Scott is criticized in comparison for lacking these qualities.¹⁹

The essay on "Mr. Brougham--Sir F. Burdett" furnishes another example of Hazlitt implying a qualification on his preference for unstructured over structured awareness. In his comparison of Irish vs. Scotch eloquence, he says that "The first of these is entirely the offspring of impulse: the last of mechanism" (xi, 134). A page later, he concludes:

Upon the whole, we despair less of the first than of the last, for the principle of life and motion is, after all, the primary condition of all genius. The luxuriant wildness of the one may be disciplined, and its excesses sobered down into reason; but the dry and rigid formality of the other can never burst the shell or husk of oratory.

Hazlitt's preference here is clear; however, his phraseology ("we despair less . . . ") indicates that he sees faults on both sides. It also indicates that "discipline" and "reason"--

¹⁹See above, Chapter III, pp. 68-69. Note also that in this essay Godwin is cited for having "rendered an essential service to moral science" (xi, 23). One need not tear aside a "veil" to be a moralist.

implying formality--have positive aspects.

In the essay on Coleridge, as mentioned above, Hazlitt characterizes the Spirit of the Age as a war between "the flame of liberty" and "Legitimacy." In the same passage (xi, 37) he rephrases the opposition as one between "reason" and "power." A similar opposition is used in the essay on Scott, where Scott, the political tool of the cause of Legitimacy, is contrasted to

poets or philosophers, heroes or sages, inventors of arts or sciences, patriots, benefactors of the human race, enlighteners and civilizers of the world, who have (so far) reduced opinion to reason, and power to law, who are the cause that we no longer burn witches and heretics at slow fires,

(xi, 66-67)

"Reason" and "law," implying the formality of logical and legal structures, are thus very positive, healthy forces in the age. Indeed, at another point in "Mr. Coleridge," Hazlitt opposes "the yearnings of humanity and the dictates of reason" to "besotted prejudice and loathsome power" (xi, 34). Not all structured perception--such as reason--is bad, therefore. Indeed, in "On the Pleasure of Hating" from 1826 Hazlitt characterizes "the spirit of the age" itself as "the progress of intellectual refinement, warring with our natural infirmities" (xii, 128-129); and since he believed that only "mechanical" arts were capable of "progress" and "refinement,"²⁰ he is

²⁰See, for example, "Why the Arts are Not Progressive" (iv, 160-164; xviii, 5-10.)

referring here to the advancement of reason and law--which he sees as eminently desirable.

"Mr. Coleridge" also contains an extended comparison of that writer and William Godwin (xi, 35f.). These two men, of course, exemplify the opposite generic qualities. And though Hazlitt does not specifically express a preference here, one thing, at least, is clear: Godwin's limited scope enabled him to produce definite results; Coleridge's universal mind, however, lost its practical effectiveness by being "the sport of every breath, dancing to every wave." The "decided preference" given to Scott over Byron is thus not found in a similar comparison of their intellectual brethren. Indeed, in speaking of Scott himself elsewhere in The Spirit of the Age, Hazlitt notes with telling irony (xi, 67-68) that his enlarged scope of mind and openness to nature were completely ineffectual in shaping his own morality.

The essayist's admiration for minds "of the greatest capacity" or "of the greatest genius" was thus not always without serious qualification. Coleridge needed limitation; Scott could have profited from more reason. Hazlitt realized the danger of an unrealistically one-sided standard of perfection; he thus saw the need for a corrective mixture of counter-balancing qualities even in two of the men who held out the most promise for correcting the excesses of an overly

prejudiced age. It is true that the major emphasis in The Spirit of the Age is on calling for more of their Shakespear-
 ean type of awareness to enlighten the age; indeed, Jeffrey, who also manifests such perception, receives very little criticism. And Hazlitt's highly laudatory sketch of Knowles, who "instinctively obeys the impulses of natural feeling" (xi, 183), closes the book, thus lending a strong final emphasis to the essayist's call for his type of natural wisdom. However, again, Hazlitt's advocacy of this unfiltered perception and openness to nature is made within a context; as he said in 1828, "We must therefore work with the instruments that are allotted us; and no man can resist the spirit of the age in which he lives" (xiv, 132). He thus calls for openness to nature as a corrective to other types of perception which are also necessary. Bentham, for example, is criticized in The Spirit of the Age for not taking account of and appealing to human prejudices (xi, 8, 11). And Godwin is praised because his intense, single-minded pursuit of reason has made a definite contribution to moral science (xi, 23); but he is also criticized, like Bentham, for neglecting "the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority, private and local attachment" (xi, 18-19). Scott and Coleridge are criticized for defects already mentioned. Mackintosh, like Coleridge, has so great a range of

knowledge that his effectiveness is dissipated (xi, 97). And Hazlitt levels a similar criticism at Wilberforce:

By aiming at too much, he has spoiled all, and neutralised what might have been an estimable character, distinguished by signal services to mankind. A man must take his choice not only between virtue and vice, but between different virtues. Otherwise, he will not gain his own approbation, or secure the respect of others. The graces and accomplishments of private life mar the man of business and the statesman. . . . It is best to choose and act up to some leading character, as it is best to have some settled profession or regular pursuit in life.

(xi, 147)

This criticism is particularly significant because of the generalizations which Hazlitt draws from the specific example of one man; and the generalizations show that he saw limitation as a necessary and desirable virtue. He again sees positive value in partisanship in the essay on "Mr. Canning," when, in criticizing this member of Parliament, he says, "A wise man would have some settled opinion, a good man would wish well to some cause, a modest man would be afraid to act without feeling sure of his ground, or to show an utter disregard for right or wrong" (xi, 154).²¹ He levels a similar criticism against Cobbett, in an essay which he added to the Paris and second English editions of Spirit: "He changes his opinions as

²¹This, incidentally, forms a very strong contrast to Keats's famous formulation of negative capability, a condition in which "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"--Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. by H.E. Rollins (2 vols.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), II, 193.

he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles" (viii, 55);²² again, the desirability of fixed or structured thought is implied. In a passage which is most significant Hazlitt also finds positive "strength" in Wordsworth's "weakness":

The current of his feelings is deep, but narrow; the range of his understanding is lofty and aspiring rather than discursive. The force, the originality, the absolute truth and identity with which he feels some things, makes him indifferent to so many others. The simplicity and enthusiasm of his feelings, with respect to nature, renders him bigotted and intolerant in his judgments of men and things. But it happens to him, as to others, that his strength lies in his weakness; and perhaps we have no right to complain. We might get rid of the cynic and the egotist, and find in his stead a commonplace man. We should 'take the good the Gods provide us': a fine and original vein of poetry is not one of their most contemptible gifts, and the rest is scarcely worth thinking of, except as it may be a mortification to those who expect perfection from human nature; or who have been idle enough at some period of their lives, to deify men of genius as possessing claims above it. But this is a chord that jars, and we shall not dwell upon it.

(xi, 94)

²²Elsewhere in this same essay (viii, 50-59) Hazlitt sees Cobbett's "egotism" as "delightful." But he also criticizes him because he "sees through the medium of heat and passion, not with reference to any general principles." Because of his "want of all rule and method" and because "his notions are free and unencumbered" he writes with "outrageous inconsistency" and "headstrong fickleness." A few sentences later, however, Hazlitt finds much value in what he has just criticized: "His shifting his point of view from time to time not merely adds variety and greater compass to his topics . . . but it gives a greater zest and liveliness to his manner of treating them." This and the ensuing remarks might just as well be applied to Hazlitt himself; the essay on Cobbett shows several shifts of his own viewpoint around his customary concerns.

This cord "jars," of course, precisely because Hazlitt recognizes himself as one of those "idle" critics who had sometimes insisted too strongly on only one standard of perfection.²³ The combined particulars of The Spirit of the Age, though, show a more mature judgment and balanced perspective. While Hazlitt stresses openness to nature throughout the book, he advocates this perspective only as a corrective to, rather than a replacement for, perspectives of narrowed, filtered, and structured vision, which he sees as necessary to balance openness. The final mixture of perspectives, then, produces a range and depth of satisfaction which could not be attained by any one perspective alone.

Hazlitt's greatest production, then, mirrors the patterns that characterize his work as a whole. The dual streams of imagination, selfless and selfish, which flow out of his earliest work in 1805, have, by 1825, swollen into wider and deeper rivers that bring life to vast tracts of thought and experience in his writings as a whole. And no matter which direction Hazlitt's imagination takes, all of his writings, critical and personal, are touched by passion and feeling--

²³See also Chapter II, above, pp. 29-30, for an analysis of another relevant and important passage from The Spirit of the Age. Cf., too, the passage quoted at the top of p. 35, also from Spirit.

his essays spring as much from his heart as from his intellect, and they have an unmistakeable depth and resonance as a result. The wise tranquility of openness to nature is something that we ourselves feel in his writing, be it in a description of Shakespeare's fated lovers, or in a memory of the unbounded prospects of youth, or in a roadside reverie on an April morning in Wales. So, too, the excited individualism that sprang from a tradition of Dissent, mellowing into a relish for every possible form of intense individuality, is brought home to us in a lively disquisition on the joys of pedantry, or in an incomparable portrait of Elia haunting the nooks and crannies of Romantic London, or in rapt appreciations of any unmatched skill from Burke's oratory to Cavanagh's handball-playing. Hazlitt himself exemplified gusto as well as any artist he wrote of. His total immersion in life is perhaps his outstanding characteristic, for he experienced life, his subject, and recreated it in his writings with the combined qualities of poet, painter, critic, and philosopher, always trying to maximize the possibilities of human satisfaction in the everyday world that all men must face. He was one of the great humanists of his age; and for range, variety, and depth of telling insight into the condition of man there are few experiences in the scope of English literature comparable to the reading of Hazlitt's collected Works.

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